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**ANDERS BREIVIK AND ELLIOT RODGER: VIOLENCE, COMMUNICATION AND THE
MEDIATED SPHERE.**

BY

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THESIS

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Introduction

The Congressional Research Services identifies a mass shooting as a public act of violence with at least four victims who are chosen indiscriminately by one or more gunmen.¹ The curious thing about the CRS' definition is that it makes an express point to exclude robbery and terrorism. It is correct and productive for the writers of the CRS study to separate the mass shooting from criminality and terrorism to focus their research. In a larger discussion about modern violence, however, separating the mass shooting as an event from other forms of modern violence can be counterproductive in that it presents it as an anomaly, as opposed to an outcome of a given society or historical trend. The CRS definition is nonetheless very useful in the discussion of mass shootings as media events, however, precisely because it separates the mass shooting from media discourses on criminality and terrorism respectively.

A mass shooting is not identified here as an act of public violence, but a case where mass media and government officials have arranged such an incident under the category of “mass shooting”. Note that in the recent shooting in a gay nightclub in Orlando, various media outlets and politicians seemed to trip over themselves attempting to determine whether it was a “terrorist attack” or “mass shooting.”² Was it politically motivated, personally motivated, Islamist related, homophobic, repressed gay self-hate on the shooter's part, or a simple case of mental illness? All terrorists have personal motivations and all personal experiences and ideals have a social and historical context, which means that the debate over terrorist attack or mass shooting is a debate about what the attack should represent and how it should be demarcated in mass media discussions of violence, security, mental illness, and firearm policy.

Media commentators have made the point that mass shootings are frequently committed by white men with right wing views, while terrorist attacks are typically committed by men of color, often of a

¹ William J. Krouse and Daniel J Richardson, *Mass Murder with Firearms, Incidents and Victims, 1999-2013* (United States Congressional Research Institute, 2015).

² Ira Hyman, PhD. "The Orlando Mass Shooting: Terrorist Attack or Hate Crime?" *Psychology Today*. June 20, 2016.

Muslim background and pledging allegiance to radical Islamist groups.³ This speaks to the discourse of terrorism in the Western world post-9-11, wherein “terrorism” is most often used to refer to a threat to a nation from outsiders (radical Islamists as the largest category) as opposed to pathological actions taken by citizens of the nation.

The most theorized terrorist attack of the 21st century thus far is the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington DC, in which the iconic twin towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed by airplanes hijacked by men pledging allegiance to al-Qaeda. Opinions on the attack were certainly heterogeneous, but what stood out most clearly as a point of agreement was that the World Trade Center was attacked for its symbolic significance. Theorists of terrorism, mass media, and communication have expanded on this basic observation to conclude that the attack itself was intended as an act of communication, media discourse specifically.⁴ To these scholars, the attackers studied the symbolic vocabulary of American mass media and chose a target with great symbolic significance, ensuring that the American and global mass media would do the remaining work for them of delivering their ideological message.

If we conclude here that a central element of terrorism is communication, specifically within the field of mass media, we can then move to a new field of inquiry in which the mass shooting as media event is also considered from the standpoint of an act of mediated communication, in which the media coverage of the shooting is consciously influenced by the shooter themselves. We can now perceive a wide trend of “personal 9/11s” in which numerous individuals put their own spin on the 2001 attacks and tried to articulate their own viewpoint via the discourse of the mass media. In the chapters that follow, we will consider two cases: the bombing and shooting attacks in 2011 by Norway’s Anders

³ Terre Starr. "Why Is Omar Mateen a Terrorist, but Not Dylann Roof?" *Fusion*. June 13, 2016. <http://fusion.net/story/313760/omar-mateen-orlando-dylann-roof-terror/>.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism; And Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2003). and Richard Schechner. *Performed Imaginaries* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

Breivik, and the shooting and stabbing attacks in the United States in 2014 by Elliot Rodger. In both cases, we can see how an act of public violence effectively constituted a communicative act, and delivered a specific ideological message through the mass media.

The mass shooting is an American phenomenon in some ways, and is often attributed to American cultural attitudes about violence and firearms.⁵ However, Europe and East Asia have also seen similar attacks. The relevance of the questions at hand to the discipline of world history is quite simply that mass communication is a global phenomenon, and that the mass shootings in the United States have their overseas counterparts, and it may be true that the proliferation of transnational mass media networks has created the specific breed of mass shooting we have seen thus far in the 21st century. In 2011, Anders Behring Breivik conducted bombing and shooting attacks on Oslo, Norway's capital, and the island of Utoya, a popular destination for summer camps. Police found that Breivik had acted alone after his arrest, but nonetheless the assault on Utoya shook Norway to the core, and it shocked the world that such a thing could happen in such a peaceful nation.

Much like the wake of mass shootings in the United States, mass media coverage of the attack in Norway and abroad centered around the causation for the attack, with various interest groups and thinkers attempting to pin the blame on forces and individuals as it benefited their agenda. Anti-racist activists blamed racism and Islamophobia, right wing groups blamed European elites and Muslim immigration itself, feminists blamed misogyny, and many mass media outlets blamed Breivik's supposed mental illness and troubled family background. In consideration of Breivik's attacks, the pattern which emerges most conspicuously is that of a political Rorschach test. Media commentators have found a way to incorporate the attacks into their own weltanschauung across the board, and as we see later all of Breivik's opponents immediately grasped that they were under attack. Breivik was very cooperative

⁵ Sarah Frostensen and Sarah Kliff, "We're 164 Days into 2016. We've Had 133 Mass Shootings." *Vox.com*. June 12, 2016. <http://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-calendar-june-2016>.

with the media, and happy to explain his views and motivations not only to the authorities but also many journalists and scholars. Not only that, he sent copies of his manifesto to numerous media outlets and has made every effort to popularize himself during his incarceration. Breivik himself succeeded in articulated his ideological point, and remains an important point of reference for “right wing populists” in Europe. In any case, Norway does not share lax firearm regulations with the United States, nor would anyone say that Norwegians and Americans have the same “culture of violence.” This suggests that the historical causation for the proliferation of mass shootings may not in fact be specifically local to the United States.

Three years later in the United States, an attack both starkly different and oddly similar occurred in Isla Vista, California. Twenty-year-old Elliot Rodger stabbed 3 men to death in his apartment before attempting a shooting attack on a University of California, Santa Barbara sorority and then embarking on a shooting rampage across the city before fleeing from police and taking his own life. Rodger also sent out a manifesto, and while it contained brief discussions of race and other social concerns, the fulcrum of Rodger's thought was avowed misogyny and a hostility toward sexuality and people who experienced fulfilling sexual relationships.⁶ Much of Rodger's online activity bemoaned his lack of success in forming relationships with women, and speculated on why he struggled so much in this pursuit. In his manifesto, he finally concluded that women themselves were to blame, and that he would have his revenge on the world itself by executing an attack on “UCSB's hottest sorority”. He failed in this pursuit, but much like Breivik his attack did spark a nationwide conversation.⁷ In this case as well, various interest groups found different culprits and sought to assimilate this media event to their agenda. Feminists blamed misogyny, gun control advocates blamed the availability of firearms, some right-wing

⁶ Chauncey DeVega, "Elliot Rodger and the Pornographic Imagination." *Daily Kos*. June 2, 2014.

⁷ Chez Pazienza, "The 6 Worst Media Responses To the Elliot Rodger Rampage (So Far)." *The Daily Banter*. May 27, 2014. <http://thedailybanter.com/2014/05/6-worst-media-responses-elliott-rodger-rampage-far/#!>

commentators claimed he was a leftist, and the “pick up artists” of the world claimed that the world needed more of their “game” to prevent similar killings in the future. As we look over the media coverage of Rodger’s attacks, we will see that the topics in play connect to most of the cultural struggles in today’s American political landscape. Rodger’s attacks and ideas are especially relevant to today’s discourse on gender. The mass media also pathologized Rodger in the same manner seen in coverage of Breivik, and focused on his emotional and psychological issues as the leading factor in the attack.

It would be reasonable to suggest that the choice of Breivik and Rodger as cases for comparison may seem arbitrary. In response, we offer that there are a few key themes in the attacks and writings of both men, and that between the two of them a clear narrative can be constructed of reactionary politics and violence on a global scale. The shared points of contention for Breivik and Rodger are white identity, misogyny, and masculinity. This can be grasped from reading their manifestos, which are both lengthy and contain explicitly articulated positions on these issues, and from reading their attacks as textual and rhetorical acts. If there is a common assertion between Breivik and Rodger, it is the assertion of white masculinity against a perceived cultural order in which whiteness and maleness are increasingly devalued.

If we recall the Congressional Research Service's definition of a mass shooting, Rodger's and arguably Breivik's attacks fall under it neatly. The narrative which reduces their attacks to the actions of mentally ill men also fits neatly with the Killer Virgin theory of the New York Post⁸ on Rodger and the “Breivik's Mum Sexualised Him” musings of the Telegraph.⁹ The New York Post’s “Killer Virgin” narrative boils Rodger’s attack down to his sexual frustration, and the Telegraph’s coverage attributes

⁸ Natalie O’Neill, "Killer Virgin Sparks a Culture War." *New York Post*. May 27, 2014. <http://nypost.com/2014/05/27/rogen-apatow-slam-critic-who-blamed-them-for-elliott-rodger-rampage/>.

⁹ Richard Orange Malmo, "Anders Behring Breivik's Mother 'Sexualised' Him When He Was Four." *The Telegraph*. October 07, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/9592433/Anders-Behring-Breiviks-mother-sexualised-him-when-he-was-four.html>.

Breivik's supposed mental illness to possible abuse by his mother. If we accept the premise that neither Breivik nor Rodger were terrorists, as the Post and Guardian seem to imply, then they fit Congress's definition of "mass shooters". Because mental illness is the only possible cause that (arguably) does not carry a political context, it follows logically that Breivik and Rodger's attacks must necessarily be acts of the mentally ill. Considering the mass shooting as the act of mentally ill person is to remove it from its social context, and thus remove it from history. In scholarly work by mental health professionals on the matter of mass shootings, we see starkly different conclusions. Jonathan M. Metzl and Kenneth T. MacLeish asserted that there is no statistical evidence linking mental illness to gun violence, and that the implication that mental illness is the prime causal factor in mass shootings mostly serves to deflect attention from other possible causes.¹⁰ Metzl and MacLeish are primarily referring to gun control and gun culture debates in their piece, and they draw from historical sources to show that mental illness has been employed in numerous points in American history as a panacea for discussion of controversial cultural or social issues. Moving forward from their insight, we endeavor to identify the other factors in question.

It is unacceptable to consider either of these attacks in a vacuum and locate them entirely within the individual actors, given the work being conducted today on subjectivity, terrorism, mass media, communications, and violence itself. "Madness" itself as a concept has been shown by many scholars to carry a fundamental historical context, and has been used in numerous societies and periods to cordon off undesirable elements or ideas and symbols which were incompatible with the functional discourse of a power structure.¹¹ In an era where nation states and international governing bodies endeavor to move beyond politics and focus on expert administration and technical proficiency, it is not shocking that

¹⁰ Jonathan M. Metzl, and Kenneth T. MacLeish, "Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms". *American Journal of Public Health* 105, 2 (2015): 240.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

terrorist attacks by first world citizens from middle class homes would be archived under madness, but this error should not proceed unimpeded. Moreover, old theoretical frameworks cannot be implied to a newly minted media event, and commonly held assumptions about subjectivity and media cannot be applied. If these presuppositions were applicable to Breivik and Rodger's cases, there would be no need for a debate.

Mass shootings have come to serve as sliding signifiers for social tensions in Western mass societies in that the discussion of any attack quickly becomes a screen for other ideological battles. In fact, it appears that the mass shootings which touch the most cultural conflicts receive the most media coverage. To connect to an ongoing conflict in a society's media discourse, a mass shooter can either mention it in his manifesto, speak on the issue in the media, or, perhaps most effectively, attack targets which carry symbolic relevance to the debate or represent a group or idea in the nation's culture. Rodger, for example, targeted a sorority, which especially in American college movies is a metaphor for feminine beauty and sexuality, which ultimately stands in for male sexual entitlement and fulfillment. Breivik attacked a youth program for Norway's labor party, specifically on an idyllic island which many Norwegians hold to be the "happiest place in Norway." Both men attacked soft targets with high symbolic values in their context, and as we will see later a reading of their biographies will show that their targets carried great meaning in both their personal and political subjectivities.

Considering modern societies as webs of mediated communication and accounting for the advent of social media and the shifting definitions of fame and celebrity, we can concur with media scholars that the distinction between "everyday life" and some form of mediated communication may be increasingly blurred, and that even the distinction between an attempt to influence media discourse and media discourse itself may need to be discarded.¹² In short, the mass shooting as a media event is itself

¹²Lars Elleström and Jørgen Bruhn, *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

an act of mediated communication between the mass shooter and their society. “Madness” has been defined in some cases as speech which is incomprehensible in the discourse of the power structure¹³, but in the case of Breivik and Rodger very direct political and cultural statements were made, in a directly discursive and communicative manner. While the mass shooting as defined by the CRS is not a new phenomenon, the “mass shooting” as media event can only meaningfully be grasped as a communicative act, and reveals within itself the deep penetration of new media forms and styles into everyday life, not only in the American context but globally as well.

Communication, or a perceived struggle to communicate, is the common thread running through Breivik and Rodger's respective lives. Both men struggled to form and maintain meaningful relationships, at first in the home, then in school, and then with women as adults. For whatever reason, be it genetics, parental neglect, or a negative environment in childhood, both men struggled as children to assimilate to the vocabulary of their surroundings, that is, they struggled to speak. Breivik had difficulty in preschool, to the point where he was almost taken into custody by the state, and Rodger had social difficulties as a child which developed into an Asperger's Syndrome diagnosis and long history of psychiatric care. Both men were the product of troubled and dissolved marriages, and had troubled relationships with both parents.

Their experiences of adolescence also did not match with the media they consumed, to the point where Rodger wrote in his manifesto that his life's failure to match the film “Alpha Dog” was a contributing factor in his choice to commit an act of violence. Both men looked to alternative ideologies and subjectivities to explain their experiences, ultimately in search of a new language and the tools to speak. The relevance of this fact to world history is that Breivik and Rodger looked to the same global communications regime for the tools to rearticulate their experiences, and in some cases found the same

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

ideas and images, a new development relative to earlier generations in both their societies. Breivik found graffiti and rap music, then right wing populism, while Rodger sifted through various corners of the internet, looking for explanations for his difficulties with women. Both men were unsuccessful in every case, and chose to embrace the most prominent form of political speech in the modern world: violence. It is also important to note here that gun violence is a prominent occurrence in modern mass media, especially that consumed by young men.¹⁴ While Douglas Kellner creates a causal link between this basic fact and an increase in these attacks, where his analysis falls short is in failing to consider the shifting structure of mass media itself. While their biographies have important parallels and there is something to be said for basic motivations for violence and the psychological makeup of a person who can commit such an atrocity, the mass shooting as an actual event can be debated until the end of time by policy analysts and criminologists. The mass shooting as a media event can, ironically, be readily apprehended as it exists in the abstract.

The actions of Breivik and Rodger are horrific by any standard, even their closest ideological compatriots made an explicit point to reject their attacks. Similarly, the views they expressed in their writings and internet activities are abhorrent and fundamentally in conflict with the basic values of their societies. In combination, the political and personal “speech” of their attacks, as much as it was an assault on what they identified as their personal antagonists (the Norwegian state, women at university), was also an attack as what they identified as the authority and power in their personal worlds. In short, in both cases we see an assertion of white male subjectivity versus a hostile and oppressive “other”, whatever form that may take.

We cannot, however, write them off as “mad” or allow other commentators and theorists to put

¹⁴ Douglas Kellner, *Guys and Guns Amok: Domestic Terrorism and School Shootings from the Oklahoma City Bombing to the Virginia Tech Massacre* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

their acts into the service of their own agendas. Instead, it is imperative that we allow these murderers to “speak” in these pages, and respond to their assertions in kind. It is also crucial that we identify the specific social antagonisms which inform their worldviews and actions, and uncover why they ended up on one side or another. Much like history, in some ways the “mass shooting” says much more about the 21st century “postmodern” West than the 21st century “postmodern” West can say about the mass shooting. Through the symptom of the mass shooting, it is our duty to work backwards.

Franco “Bifo” Berardi theorizes that the mass shooter is part of a global wave of suicides and mass murders which show the human body and mind disintegrating under the pressure of an increasingly brutal financial capitalism¹⁵. Other theorists have asserted that the mass shooting is the product of an increasingly de-centered white masculinity fighting back against minority rights, feminism, and a decline in earning potential and job security. Another theory is that the mass shooting is a “copycat” variation on suicide bombings, and that mass shooters are attacking “neoliberal hegemony” via the same methodology as their counterparts overseas. Girardians focus on “mimetic rivalry” and would theorize that the failure to build successful relationships or create stable emotional lives leaves the attackers with only violence as a recourse.¹⁶ While some of these interpretations are more cogent than others, what they share is a focus on the mass shootings as symptomatic of larger historical trends, or as an outcome of a specific context. In theorizing the mass shooting, it is important to look for structural and systemic factors in both national locales and global historical developments, rather than focusing on one specific conflict such as gender or racism. While misogyny could certainly be identified as the fulcrum of Rodger's attack, it does not fully explain Breivik's. Racism and misogyny are also systemic cultural and structural problems, and as such inform the experience and worldview of modern

¹⁵ Scott McLemee, "Review of Franco Berardi, 'Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide'" *Inside Higher Ed*. Sept 2, 2015.

¹⁶ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

subjects across the board. Not every modern subject commits a mass shooting, ergo there must be other factors.

If any preliminary hypothesis will be offered at this point, it will be that the proliferation and consolidation of mass media outlets across the globe during the last 20 years of the 20th century have created a global communications regime, and in turn created a global intersubjectivity. What is meant by this is that as modern subjects increasingly refer to the same mass media apparatuses to construct their senses of themselves and their societies, they have and will continue to find themselves assimilated into the same global semiotic order. In the case of Norway and the United States, for example, the availability of American film and television programming in both settings has created a scenario in which Anders Breivik and Elliot Rodger would have similar referents in the construction of their respective subjective experiences of the world. While the images and concepts that appear in both of their “textual attacks” are similar, what is most crucial in considering the similarity of their attacks is the rise of the infrastructure which delivered the same information and imagery to both young men. Most importantly, gun violence has been a pervasive cultural and symbolic image in the media consumed by both men and many young men across the Western world.

Theoretical Framework

In considering the mass shooting as an act of mediated communication, it is important to construct a basic theoretical model of how mediated communication itself functions in the late 20th/early 21st century world and what should be taken to constitute an act of mediated communication. On the question of the historicization of the mass shooting it is also necessary to clarify the relationship between modernity and mediated communication, and try to establish a working model for the mechanics of how subjectivity is created and maintained by mass media in the “mass societies” of the Western world from the early 20th century to the present.

The first claim in play in these chapters is that the mass shooting, rather than being simply defined via the Congressional Research Institute definition, is as much a media event as it is something which occurs in material space and is then reported and reframed by the mass media. Collapsing the dichotomy between “event” and “media coverage” is the first order of business. For a workable definition of the media event, we turn to Daniel Dayan and Elihui Katz’ “Defining Media Events”, printed in *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*. For Dayan and Katz, the chief difference between a media event and other forms of broadcasting is that a media event is not routine, and can be identified as a disruption of normal media coverage.¹⁷ It is important to clarify that Dayan and Katz are referring in their piece to scheduled events such as the funeral of Princess Diana or the World Cup soccer championship. Considering this fact, their claims about the significance of media events cannot of course be directly transposed onto impromptu media coverage of a mass killing in Oslo, and some qualifications must be made. Collapsing the dichotomy between the passive consumer and active producer of mass media will be the first step, and will be discussed in a few paragraphs.

Dayan and Katz go on to explain that the function of the media event is the harmonization of its viewers into one “collective heartbeat”, and the unification of a society’s citizens into one coherent moment of solidarity. A royal wedding in the United Kingdom is presented as a chief example.¹⁸ The scheme that Dayan and Katz present is highly schematic and organized, if not intentional. In their view, governments and other political entities collaborate with media organizations to produce media coverage designed to influence viewers’ perceptions and created a feeling of solidarity and universal belonging in each polity. This raises the question of whether this level of coordination is necessary for a media event to have this effect, or whether the relationship between coverage and reception of an event should be

¹⁷ Daniel Dayan and Elihui Katz, "Defining Media Events." In *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Dennis McQuail (London: Sage Publications, 2005), pp. 90-99.

¹⁸ Dayan and Katz, "Defining Media Events," 90-99.

problematized or reconsidered. Moreover, is it possible that impromptu coverage of unplanned events could serve a similar purpose? For the 21st century context, the most useful unplanned media event to consider for this question is the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. For our purposes, 9/11 is especially useful considering the complicated relationship between mass shootings and terrorism as discursive entities.

Jane Caputi curiously employs a Jungian framework to explain American response to the 9/11 attacks. For Caputi, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks specifically chose the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center as a target due to their symbolic significance, and hence the reaction the attacks would garner.¹⁹ This a noncontroversial stance amongst theorists of mass media, echoed by semiotician Jean Baudrillard,²⁰ performance studies theorist Richard Schechner,²¹ and others. Baudrillard opens his essay referring to the exact media events discussed by Dayan and Katz, namely royal weddings and sporting significance, but notes that 9/11 was the first media event of “global symbolic significance.”²² This to say that while Princess Diana’s funeral or a State of the Union address from President Barack Obama may serve a purpose in each polity, their global significance is limited.

Drawing links between these concepts, we can see that 9/11 is a media event which was created not by mass media organizations themselves, but by the perpetrators via the mass media. Considering this transition, we can begin to piece out a scheme in which the perpetrators of a terrorist attack focus on a target for its symbolic value, attack the target, and then watch as the mass media delivers their precise ideological message to the consumer. Rather than a simple top down system in which “the media” produces a series of images and narratives which it then beams down to the viewer, we can see the mass

¹⁹ Jane Caputi, "Guest Editor's Introduction: Of Towers and Twins, Synchronicities and Shadows: Archetypal Meanings in the Imagery of 9/11." *The Journal of American Culture* 28.1 (2005): 1-10.

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism; And Other Essays*. (London: Verso, 2003.)

²¹ Richard Schechner, *Performed Imaginaries*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.)

²² Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism; And Other Essays*. (London: Verso, 2003.)

media as a field of struggle and communication between different facets of society, a view in line with the media theorists of Britain's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Stuart Hall, one of the Centre's leading theorists, originated a model for understanding media messages labeled the "Decoding/Encoding" system. Hall's system, despite its simplicity, is remarkably versatile and has been employed by scholars across numerous disciplines. In "The Television Discourse: Encoding and Decoding", Hall notes that media communication is much more productively regarded with respect to its symbolic content, and that any "raw historical event" must be translated into a "televisual" language before it can be transmitted and regarded by an audience.²³

Put in literal terms, we consider Anders Breivik's actual act of shooting dozens of youths on the Norwegian island of Utoya as a "raw historical event," and the ensuing media coverage as the translation of said event into televisual (or digital/online) discourse. The argument here is that the actual attack, the media coverage of the attack, and the public response to the media coverage, all constitute parts of a cohesive and complementary system. Namely, that the "mass shooting" is best understood as a communicative act in which the shooter intentionally creates a media event via an act of mass violence in the public sphere.

The nuts and bolts of Hall's encoding/decoding scheme are relatively straightforward. The most important element of Hall's theory is that it allows for more agency on the part of the viewer or consumer than other theorists. For Hall, a message is encoded within a televisual language of signs and symbols, and then decoded by the audience in several different ways.²⁴ While a sign-oriented reading of a media image is not a new idea, the notion of a series of different readings is the genius of Hall's theory. In the encoding/decoding theory, any media message or product is decoded by audience in one of

²³ Stuart Hall, "The Television Discourse: Encoding and Decoding." In *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Dennis McQuail,. (London: Sage Publications 2005.) p. 302-309.

²⁴ Hall, pp. 302-309.

three ways. The audience may perceive the message in the dominant/hegemonic way, in which they receive the transmission the way they are intended to by the sender (British state media or CNN for example). The second reading of the event is the negotiated position, where the audience accepts the basic premise of the transmission but leave room for their own interests or perspective. The final reading is the “oppositional” decoding of the message, in which the viewer rejects the message or concludes opposite that intended by the sender²⁵. This theory of mass communication can be applied to mass shootings in the following ways:

1. Mass shooters, like the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, choose targets for their symbolic value. Hence, their tactics and choice of targets themselves constitute the “encoding” of a message.
2. A mass shooting, as a media event, can be regarded or decoded in numerous different ways by its audience. For example, many feminists viewed Anders Breivik’s attacks as essentially anti-woman, while anti-racists viewed them as acts of white supremacist aggression.
3. Anecdotally, or perhaps crucially, many mass shooters have been demonstrated to have been highly prolific consumers of mass media. This would suggest that they themselves were highly fluent in televisual discourse, and would thus be highly adept at encoding their attacks as acts of mediated communication.

In the chapters to follow, we will argue that the mass shooting has been an act of mediated communication in which public acts of violence are intentionally planned for the symbolic significance of their targets, and media apparatuses deliver whatever message the shooter encoded in their attack.

²⁵ Stuart Hall, pp. 302-309.

Even with a coherent theoretical structure in place for conceptualizing the mass shooting, we still have some work to do. The problem with the ideas in place thus far is that they function in the present tense, and hence are ahistorical. This leaves us in the position of needing to demonstrate how the work herein contributes to a historical understanding of the mass shooting as a media event. In John P. Thompson's *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, the core argument is that we can consider the development of mass societies from the perspective of the development of technologies of mediated communication. This is simple enough, and not particularly novel considering the career of Marshall McLuhan and company, but Thompson adds another key element to the discussion. For Thompson, mass media both as a technology and as an institution is inextricably linked with the development and maintenance of the public sphere, or simply the public. The public sphere is a popular concept amongst theorists, and simply refers to the spaces in modern societies which are beyond the direct control of the state or other institutions. For Jurgen Habermas the rise of bourgeois society and Enlightenment ideals was directly linked to the development of spaces where free debate and discussion could take place, and the invention of new technologies for circulating and disseminating sophisticated concepts.²⁶

Thompson's argument hinges upon the claim that the key to understanding the relationship between mass media and modernity is understanding the role mediated communication plays in the ongoing creation of the public sphere. Mass shootings are by definition acts of *public* violence, in that they almost always take place in public places. Thus, a renegotiated relationship between the public and private spheres is an important component of the mass shooting as a discursive act. Most importantly, what we consider to be public or private matters and the dichotomy itself are all products of historical forces.

²⁶ John B Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in Association with Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

The most basic point gleaned here from Thompson's work is the notion that self and subjectivity in the modern world are fundamentally tied to mediated communication on a mass scale.²⁷ Put simply, subjects in modern societies construct their self-image from symbols and images they receive via the mass media, and experience the possibility of constructing a worldview partially or completely unmoored from their physical locale.²⁸ Adopting this view from Thompson opens the possibility of combining theories of subjectivity with theories of mass media, and necessitates that we "open up" the modern subject into a field in which a mass shooter, for example, develops their identity and worldview in conversation not only with their direct experiences but also with images and concepts from mass media. Televisual discourse, in this case, ceases to be a language external to the modern subject but becomes to a certain extent the language of their internal monologue. In a field of ideas renegotiated thusly, what distinction is there between a media event as planned by television producers, a terrorist attack designed for its ripple effects in mass media coverage, or even an interaction between two people in material space?

There are other historical factors present in Thompson's analysis. From a world history perspective, we can contemplate his claims on the global proliferation of mass media outlets, as well as their consolidation under a few conglomerates. Thompson notes that not only has mediated communication spread across the world, that the actual control of the content and physical infrastructure has increasingly been concentrated in the hands of a few actors.²⁹ This would be a significant development in and of itself, but Thompson also adds that this process has increasingly continued without respect to the borders

²⁷ Thompson, 205.

²⁸ Thompson, 206.

²⁹ Thompson, 238.

of nation-states, and that thus the insights of previous theorists of the mass media and communicative rationality have become increasingly obsolete.³⁰

As a historical development, we can contemplate the rise of a global communications system in which subjectivities and worldviews are constructed from increasingly similar options in terms of symbolic content. For an example, we can consider the spread of American action movies throughout the world, and notice that films like “Robocop” or “Reservoir Dogs” have been consumed both here in the United States but also in such far flung locales as Tokyo or Stockholm. What this means is that the identities and subjectivities of young men in these places have become increasingly intelligible to one another, and increasingly constructed from the same referents. This is a related concept to Frederic Jameson’s theory of singular modernity, in which the end of the cold war and proliferation of global capitalism has increasingly created a world in which one vision of modernity and progress reigns supreme over all human reality.³¹ We can also consider this development as an increased state of global intertextuality, in which media events and other discursive acts increasingly contain the same symbolic content and have become more and more intelligible outside of their immediate contexts. For another example, we can refer to the influence of Japanese anime cartoons on the 1980s film “Blade Runner”, and even further into the past the reworking of American noir and western films by Japanese and European filmmakers. It is also important to note that the basic image of a man with a gun shooting numerous enemies is one of the most common images in all these forms of media, to the point where filmic violence has become referential to other filmic violence, as opposed to so called real world violence.³² If the boundary between the real world and the mediated world is increasingly porous, then this process can also affect

³⁰ Thompson, 239.

³¹ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present*. (London: Verso Books 2002.)

³² Paul Gormley, *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Culture*. (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2005).

acts of violence in the real world. Breivik himself claimed that he used video games to train for his attacks,³³ and Rodger too was an avid game player.³⁴ While gaming and film do not necessarily carry the same role in modern societies, we can at the very least point to a connection between violent media and violent acts in the lives of the two men.

It is important to bring these new ideas into conversation with the theories we formulated earlier in the chapter. From Dayan and Katz, we extracted the concept of a media event, a disruption in normal media coverage which serves the purpose of bringing audiences together. With Jean Baudrillard and Jane Caputo, we observed that terrorist attacks often serve the same purpose as media events, and can often be taken to constitute the same thing. This created a scheme in which mass media is a field of communication and struggle, rather than a single institution sending messages to consumers. For an intelligible system of how these struggles and discourse function, we turned to Stuart Hall, who showed that messages are encoded with a specific set of symbols and images, and that the subjectivity of the consumer is as important in the process of mediated communication as the intentions of the sender. This left us with a theory of the mass shooting as a planned communicative act in which a specific message is delivered through an act of violence and the ensuing media coverage. Critical to this theory is the conception of the act itself and its media coverage as one cohesive system, and the symbolic value of the targets and the tactics of the shooter as a process of encoding their message.

It is also imperative to take a moment to clarify what is meant by “whiteness”. Whiteness and white male identity are signifiers and cultural ideas which will make regular appearances in the chapters to follow, and it is important to demonstrate the historical and cultural significance of “whiteness” as a concept. It may seem strange that explicit references to whiteness or white identity do not appear in

³³ Helen Pidd, "Anders Breivik 'trained' for Shooting Attacks by Playing Call of Duty," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2012.

³⁴AlterNet Staff, "8 Things You May Not Know About Elliot Rodger's Killing Spree," *Alternet*, May 28, 2014.

Breivik or Rodger's manifestos, and at the same time these very ideas are commonly employed to make sense of their ideas and rhetoric. Neil Altman writes that the nature of whiteness in the multicultural post-civil rights context is precisely this, a blind spot and an absent signifier.³⁵ For Altman, the absence of an explicitly articulated white identity (in the wake of cultural shifts and civil rights legislation) has relegated whiteness to an unconscious position in the mind of the modern subject, and thus a default or normative identity is always already racialized and taken to be whiteness. In this context, the identity of a black or Muslim person is taken to be racialized while that of a white person is conceived as devoid of race or particularity.³⁶ In the pages to follow, where Breivik and Rodger are taken to be referring to white identity or white nationalist concepts in case where they do not do so explicitly, it is under the observation of this theoretical principle. Another important point is that these shifts in Western political and cultural discourse come up explicitly in Breivik's writing, and his ideology can be taken as an effort to reassert a Norwegian/European/white identity as one carrying a unique history and particularity. As a rule, it will be assumed that white and male identities are rarely explicated in mass media images and narratives, and that to be examined it is necessary to draw them out using theories drawn from film and media studies.

We now need to historicize the production of the mass shooting and show how today's mass shootings and other media events can be grasped from a perspective of world history. From John Thompson, we took the idea that the selves and subjectivities of modern people have been increasingly constructed in conversation with images and ideas taken from mass media. Not only that, media institutions have become increasingly concentrated under a few conglomerates, and spread their power and in-

³⁵ Neil Altman, "Whiteness". *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* LXXV (1) 2006: 45-72.

³⁶ Altman, 50.

fluence globally. What this means for the purposes of world history is that the abovementioned processes of mediated communication have become intelligible on a global scale, and that California's Eliot Rodger and Norway's Anders Breivik developed their ideas, plans, and tactics in the same field of mediated communication. This would not be the case in earlier historical epochs. We also considered that the available field of symbolic content and images has become an increasingly global field, and that mass shooters in different nations, for example, are integrated into the same discursive system in the same way that academics in Japan and Argentina are increasingly in conversation with each other.

CHAPTER 1: ANDERS BREIVIK AND MEDIA DISCOURSE

In "Constructing Dark Celebrity", Daniel Drageset argues that, as notorious criminals and murderers have achieved greater visibility in mass media, a sentiment has developed that committing a horrific crime is a sure-fire way to "get famous" and achieve a certain degree of celebrity.³⁷ Drageset then grafts this model onto the case of Anders Breivik, and makes the claim that Breivik's 2011 attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utoya were at least in some way motivated by a desire to "become famous".³⁸ Drageset's basic contention that ensuing media coverage of the attacks was a motivating factor for Breivik is true enough, but oversimplifies the case and stops too far too short. Rather than a simple cause and effect scheme in which Breivik conducted a domestic terrorist attack to provoke attention from the mass media, it is more useful to consider Breivik's attack as an effort to influence media discourse itself and deliver a political message through the medium of mass violence. Breivik's attacks (and domestic terrorism itself) are a form of communication in which he demonstrates a wide ranging symbolic vocabulary, or "televisual discourse" and makes adept use of it in delivering an ideological message. Breivik's message, a right wing white nationalist challenge to Norway's prevailing order of multicultural tolerance and gender equality,

³⁷ Daniel Drageset "Constructing Dark Celebrity" *Pacific Journalism Review*, 19(2) (2013): 70-85.

³⁸ Drageset, 73.

was delivered quickly and succinctly. Media coverage of the attacks both immediate and long term has retooled and disseminated Breivik's message across several mediums, and ultimately legitimated his ideology as a genuine challenge to the European ideal. Many commentators and news clips decried the attack as “an assault on the values Norwegians hold most dear”, which more than anything demonstrates the efficacy of Breivik's project.³⁹

Where Drageset fails is in if Breivik's attack was motivated by its potential media coverage solely in terms of exposure and amount of coverage, as opposed to a delivery of a specific message through the mass media itself. Drageset cites Breivik as stating that “being ignored is the worst thing that can happen”, and being unconcerned with his demonization as a violent right wing extremist.⁴⁰ Similarly, the day after the attacks, Oslo police spokesman Roger Andresen was quoted in *The Guardian* that “he is clear on the point that he wants to explain himself”, about Breivik.⁴¹ The notion of terrorism as communication is not original to these pages, nor is it particularly novel in the field of media studies. Jeff Lewis, early in *Language Wars*, lays out his basic framework by quoting Brigitte Nacos in her assertion that communication is the central factor in both terrorism and anti-terrorism, and that terrorism is best considered as an act of communication.⁴² Moving forward from these points, the question at hand is not only what message Breivik was looking to get across, but also the symbolic vocabulary with which he delivered it, and the extent to which mass media outlets aided or counteracted him in this pursuit.

To begin, we will consider what can generally be said to constitute Breivik's ideology. While Breivik has changed his stance on numerous issues throughout his media career he was always opposed to multiculturalism, Islam, feminism, immigration to Europe, and Marxism, and that he interpreted these

³⁹ "Norway's Open Values Intact Five Years after Breivik Attack." *The Local*. July 21, 2016.

⁴⁰ Drageset, 75.

⁴¹ P Beaumont, “Norway attacks: At least 92 killed in Oslo and Utøya island”. Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/23/norway-attacks>

⁴² Jeff Lewis, *Language Wars: The Role of Media and Culture in Global Terror and Political Violence*. (London: Pluto, 2005).

oppositions via a populist and white nationalist lens.⁴³ Breivik's manifesto, the best source for understanding his political beliefs at the time of his attacks, is a sprawling text of roughly 1500 pages which borrows from numerous ideologies and thinkers, and attempts to cobble together numerous right wing tropes and narratives into one unified system of ideas. Numerous passages are interpolated directly from Ted Kaczynski⁴⁴, another mass killer, Norwegian right wing blogger "Fjordman"⁴⁵, and numerous other right wing commentators both mainstream and marginal are cited at length. The most important narrative arcs in the manifesto are the revisionist historical narratives that explain modern European history from Breivik's perspective, and cast the average native European (white) citizen as the political subject of his personal ideology.⁴⁶

The first element of Breivik's ideology is the "Frankfurt School conspiracy theory." As the theory goes, the Frankfurt School and other Marxist intellectuals in interwar Europe, sensing that a communist revolution was a futile pursuit, decided instead to dismantle the Western world internally by destroying traditional gender roles, pride in one's ethnicity, sexual morality, and other traditional or conservative values⁴⁷. While the attribution of changing cultural values about sexuality, gender, and race to a sinister global conspiracy is in and of itself a narrative ploy that many right-wing thinkers would find appealing, it is also important to note that the "Frankfurt School conspiracy theory" narrative also includes collusion and support from global elites.⁴⁸ Which is to say that, per this scheme, world leaders have made a concerted effort to apply the Frankfurt School's ideas and deconstruct Western culture. The idea of amoral

⁴³ Matthias Gardell, "The Roots of Breivik's Ideology: Where Does the Romantic Male Warrior Ideal Come from Today?" *OpenDemocracy*.

⁴⁴ Dan Amira, "Anders Breivik Plagiarized Ted Kaczynski." *Daily Intelligencer*. May/June, 2011. http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2011/07/anders_breivik_unabomber.html.

⁴⁵ Aage Storm Borchgrevink and Guy Puzey. *A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya*. (London: Polity, 2013.) p. 93.

⁴⁶ Matthias Gardell, "The Roots of Breivik's Ideology: Where Does the Romantic Male Warrior Ideal Come from Today?" *OpenDemocracy*.

⁴⁷ Anders Behring Breivik, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, Open Source Document, page 23.

⁴⁸ Jason Wilson, "Cultural Marxism: A Uniting Theory for Rightwingers Who Love to Play the Victim." *The Guardian*. January 18, 2015.

societal elites betraying the interests of the common people appears again and again in Breivik's writing, as well as in a great deal of far-right discourse online. It is also important to note the gender politics of how Breivik interprets this theory. Throughout his writing, Breivik returns again and again to the theme of the Norwegian welfare state and its gender discrimination policies as not only oppressive, but in many ways, feminine. Breivik himself was raised by a single mother who held liberal political ideals, and wrote in his manifesto that he had been feminized by her parenting style.⁴⁹ Breivik was a product of Gro Harlem Brundtland's Norway, in which sweeping reforms were passed which sought to raise the status of women in society and support them in the home. The theme of resentment against a feminized society and political leadership is an important theme in Breivik's thought, and would later come to inform his terror attacks. Aage Borchgrevink, in *A Norwegian Tragedy*, recounts how Brundtland was the face of the Labor Party in Breivik's childhood, and explains how Breivik conceived of her as the "murderer of the nation", a play on her nickname "the mother of the nation".⁵⁰ Breivik's view of Brundtland as an oppressive and evil Freudian mother will reappear, so for now we will leave it at the assertion that Breivik's gender politics are intertwined with his understanding of history. Recalling Thompson, we can see the discursive links between late 20th century Norwegian history and Breivik's own experience.

The two most important terms in Breivik's ideology regarding this conspiracy theory are "political correctness" and "Cultural Marxism". Political correctness, as Breivik defines it, is the "General Line" of the Western European establishment.⁵¹ The true source of political correctness, for Breivik, is the ideology of Cultural Marxism, in which the standard dichotomy of workers and owners is applied in cultural terms to women, homosexuals, racial minorities, the disabled, and so on. The "White Christian Male" is deemed evil, and subverting traditional power dynamics is the top ideological priority¹⁰. Remember, Breivik also

⁴⁹ Michelle Goldberg, "Norway Killer's Hatred of Women." *The Daily Beast*. July 24, 2011.

⁵⁰ Borchgrevink, 205.

⁵¹ Breivik, 347.

held that modern states and political leaders had participated in the spread and enforcement of this ideology, and that the effort to overturn and “deconstruct” traditional European values has been a concerted effort by both militant far left forces and the state itself in modern Europe. Breivik's study of 20th century academic leftism is remarkably wide ranging, and while he interprets the theories of Wilhelm Reich, for example, in their binary opposition to “traditional European” sexual mores, his text does demonstrate a basic understanding of Reich's ideas. At this point it is important to note that while these ideas appear in Breivik's compendium, not everything in his manifesto is written by Breivik himself. The chapters on Cultural Marxism are mostly lifted from the Free Congress Institute, a think tank founded by New Right leader Paul Heydrich, mostly known for coining the term Moral Majority.⁵² Regarding Breivik, it's important to recall that he always functioned as much as a curator and arranger than he does an authentic generator of ideas. Thus, his ideology was always intertextual, and his manifesto is as much a vanishing point of various political ideas as it was a cohesive statement.

The second revisionist theory Breivik cites and embraces is significant in that it links his thought to numerous other far right elements in the Western world. Breivik trades heavily in the Eurabia theory, the idea that European civilization has been engaged in an existential struggle with the Islamic world for centuries, and specifically interprets Muslim immigration to Europe as part of a concerted effort to colonize and subvert European civilization to Islam.⁵³ The invasions of France by the Umayyad Caliphate and Austria-Hungary by the Ottoman Empire are interpreted both literally and symbolically as an existential threat to Europe, as is Muslim immigration to Europe. The link between the Eurabia theory and “Cultural Marxism” is the notion that European political elites have deliberately encouraged and abetted widespread Muslim migration to Europe to accelerate their overall project of the destruction of Western culture.⁵⁴

⁵² Sarah Posner, “How Anders Breivik's 'Cultural Analysis' is Drawn From the Christian Worldview,” *Religion Dispatches*, July 27, 2011.

⁵³ Breivik, 595.

⁵⁴ Andrew Brown, “Anders Breivik is Not Christian, but Anti-Islam.” *The Guardian*, July 24, 2011.

Indeed, Breivik's shooting on the island of Utoya was targeted at the youth wing of Norway's Labour party, which had dominated Norwegian politics during the period in which Muslim immigrants began to arrive in Norway en masse. Recalling Breivik's gendered interpretation of the Norwegian political class and its activities, we now introduce the relationship between the virile and uncivilized masculinity Breivik perceives in Muslim immigrant men (and the Muslim world itself), and the feminine attributes he attributes to the Norwegian state. In combination with the common trope of the "Rape of Europa", we can begin to discern a narrative structure in which there is a metaphorical sexual relationship between the feminized and supine West and the threatening and sexually aggressive Muslim East.⁵⁵ Breivik interprets immigration policies and multiculturalism via this lens. In short, Breivik concludes that reasonable opposition to Muslim immigration and discussion of the cultural incompatibility of Muslim immigrants and their host countries is suffocated by the discourse of "political correctness" and multiculturalism. While Breivik's compendium contains a huge range of ideas and narratives, the principal enemy he identifies is European elites and their efforts to undermine European civilization and its values.

One of the most telling passages in Breivik's manifesto is that in which he explains his relationship with masculinity. On page 732, Breivik remarks that "When I was younger and a lot more ignorant I used to ask myself this very question about Europeans. What's wrong with us, what's wrong with the European modern man? Why doesn't he rise up against the multiculturalist elites and at least attempt to inflict some damage or contribute to seize power on behalf of himself, his family and his people? Many state leaders around the world are puzzled over how little resistance the European elites are getting in their attempts to completely demographically reshape Europe."⁵⁶ Breivik concludes that the discourse of political correctness has been internalized by most men across Europe and left them defenseless not only against the activities of their societal elites but also against the various crimes and abuses of Muslim immigrants in

⁵⁵ Borchgrevink, 204.

⁵⁶ Breivik, 732.

Europe. It is also important to note that Breivik almost always uses “European” or “native/indigenous European” instead of “white” in his description of the besieged Norwegian population. If there were time we could split hairs about the distinction, but for now we will suffice it to say that white identity is one of the hidden kernels of Breivik’s political ideology. In any case, this was the point at which Breivik's narrative moved to the trope of a long abused and subordinated white man reasserting his masculinity and control of his reality through acts of violence.

This is a narrative device with a wide range of expressions and retelling in Western mass media, specifically in American cinema. Recalling our theory of the global intertextuality of mass media, we can see how concepts from an American film of the 1970s can be assumed to in some way to have cycle through popular culture, echoing into the 2011 attacks in Norway. The most readily accessible example is Martin Scorsese's “Taxi Driver”, in which a seemingly anonymous taxicab driver takes it upon himself to rid 1970s New York of corruption and social decay, culminating in a gun battle in a house of prostitution in which he rescues a young girl from sexual exploitation and becomes a national hero. The plot of the film is remarkably like Breivik's narrative, most notably the role of societal elites in propagating and abetting social decay and a single man's duty to right their wrongs through extreme violence. Sabine Haenni writes in *Journal of Film and Video* that the larger subtext of “Taxi Driver” is a decaying American metropolis in which the heterosexual white male is no longer the dominant force in his reality and finds himself struggling to assert any kind of identity in his new context.⁵⁷ Scorsese's Travis Bickle returns himself to prestige and dominance through his shootout with a young girl's sexual exploiters, but only after a failed attempt to assassinate a senator. This is an important point, the notion of violence against both the “high” and “low” elements of society, as compared with Breivik's contempt for both Norway's political leaders and its “slum dwelling” Muslim immigrants.

⁵⁷ Sabine Haenni, “Geographies of Desire: Postsocial Urban Space and Historical Revision in the Films of Martin Scorsese”. *Journal of Film and Video*, 62, no. 1, (2010): 67-85.

In both cases, the heterosexual white male subject is beset on all sides both by corrupt elites and brutish social outsiders, and emerges from said bondage through an act of violence. Breivik's narrative is also remarkably like D-FENS in "Falling Down", the protagonists of "Fight Club", Neo in "The Matrix", and other narratives from American cinema, but in the interest of space we will simply conclude that tropes from American cinema and other mass media can reasonably be assumed to form part of Breivik's symbolic vocabulary. Another key theme in both *Taxi Driver* and Breivik's writing is sexual rejection in favor of a racialized other. In "Taxi Driver" Robert DeNiro attempts to "rescue" a young girl who rejects his attempt to do so, much like Breivik perceived himself as erotically rejected by the Norwegian state and modern Norway overall. There is also a clear link here with Rodger, who of course identified his own feelings of sexual rejection as the motivation for his attacks. D-FENS's wife in "Falling Down" has also left him, showing that gun violence as a white and male response to unrequited sexual and romantic feelings is an image which has echoed through Western mass media for decades.

The first attack Anders orchestrated was the detonation of a car bomb on a street in Oslo housing numerous government offices, including the office of the Prime Minister. Jens Stoltenberg, Norway's Prime Minister at the time, is an object of derision in much of Breivik's writing, as is the Labour Party as a whole.⁵⁸ The metaphorical significance of bombing government buildings is hardly difficult to decipher, but his next move has been the subject of much more debate and analysis. After the bombing, Breivik boarded a ferry to the island of Utoya disguised as a police officer, beckoned several members of the Labour Party's youth wing over to himself, and then began firing indiscriminately. In the ensuing attack, Breivik managed to kill 69 people, and injure 110.⁵⁹ The attack was symbolically significant for numerous reasons. For one, the Workers' Youth League held its annual summer retreat on Utoya every year, and for

⁵⁸ Borchgrevink, 15

⁵⁹ *Scandinavian Journal of Trauma, Resuscitation and Emergency Medicine*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <http://sjtrem.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1757-7241-20-3>

many Norwegians this was emblematic of the values of democracy, tolerance, and openness that characterized their nation and its self-concept. For Breivik, the retreat was emblematic of “Cultural Marxist” elites and their efforts to destroy European civilization.

Here, it is important to note Breivik's deliberate decision to attack a gathering of the Labour party's youth wing at their yearly summer retreat, as opposed to a gathering of party officials. The choice to kill such young people in such great numbers was understandably shocking to both national and global audiences. Aage Borchgrevink quotes Breivik as saying that the attack was “cruel but necessary”, and that it was better to kill too many people rather than too few to ensure a strong ideological impact.⁶⁰ Breivik is also quoted as saying that “morality” had lost meaning in the struggle for European civilization, and that the more basic question of death or survival had more meaning in his context. In short, while Breivik himself seems to have abandoned standard norms of morality, he clearly understood the significance of “The Safest Place in Norway”, and had calculated the “ideological impact” of an assault on it.

For a theoretical precedent, we may recall in *Critical Theories of Mass Media* in which the authors assert that the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks specifically utilized a symbolic vocabulary that American audiences would understand, and that would fit within the image lexicon of American politics⁶¹. In a similar vein, Breivik attacked a site with deep metaphorical significance in Norwegian politics, and shot dozens of minors to strike the vulnerable heart of what he considered to be the dominant force in Norwegian politics. What appears to be a cowardly action can also be interpreted as a symbolic gesture, and a physical manifestation of Breivik's mission to challenge what he perceived as the dominant discourse of European politics. Most importantly, we can observe here that Breivik's attack displayed a highly proficient use of “televisual discourse”, and in a certain sense constituted an intentionally planned media event.

⁶⁰ Borchgrevink, 273.

⁶¹ P. A. Taylor and J. L. Harris, *Critical Theories of Mass Media: Then and Now*. (Buckingham, GBR: Open University Press 2008.) p. 188.

Our next question is to what extent were the narratives in Breivik's ideology reflected in his actions, and to what extent were his political views transmitted through his actions into mass media discourse? The first place to begin is the immediate mass media coverage of the attacks. A *Guardian* article posted the day after the attacks entitled “Norway Attacks: At Least 92 Killed in Oslo and Utøya Island” quotes Prime Minister Stoltenberg as stating that Breivik had transformed a “paradise island” into a “hell”, and that Norway did not have a major problem with right-wing extremists.⁶² First we can see that Breivik's choice of a target had precisely the symbolic value he had hoped for, and that the ideological impact of his attack was indeed as strong as he had hoped, given the Prime Minister's outraged reaction. In closing, the article states that a friend of Breivik's had been quoted as saying he had “nationalistic views” and that he was a critic of “the idea that people of different cultures can live together.”⁶³ The more outraged a reaction Breivik received from the press, the more his ideology could be interpreted as a threat to the dominant discourse, and hence the stronger his cause appears. In “Utoya, the island paradise turned into hell by Ander Breivik,” youth camp leader Eskil Pedersen is quoted as saying “We meet terror and violence with more democracy and will continue to fight against intolerance.”⁶⁴ Certainly a heartfelt dedication to one's principles as they come under attack, but from the perspective of Breivik's ideology Pedersen's statement is an acknowledgment of the fact that his attack represents a threat to Norway's dominant discourse, that of tolerance and democracy. In both cases, we can see that the media did Breivik's work for him on the basic matter of establishing his opposition to the dominant conception of “Norwegian values”.

⁶² P. Beaumont, “Norway attacks: At least 92 killed in Oslo and Utøya island”. *The Guardian*. July 23, 2011.

⁶³ Beaumont.,

⁶⁴ M. Townsend and T McVeigh, “Utøya, the island paradise turned into hell by Anders Behring Breivik”. *The Guardian*. July 23, 2011.

In “Norway attacks: Utøya gunman Boasted of Links to UK Far Right”, Breivik is quoted as speaking on his links to the English Defense League and other anti-Islam organizations in Europe, and is described as a “Christian fundamentalist.”⁶⁵ Very telling is the discussion of Breivik's opinions on the tactics of far-right groups in Europe and how he approved of their efforts to provoke strong reactions from their political opponents. While it seems clear that media coverage of Breivik's attacks gave a wide berth of exposure to his political views and associations, it is also worth considering the way that said coverage could possibly be interpreted by someone sharing Breivik's ideology (or indeed, by Breivik himself). If Breivik's ideology and his attacks are identified as a threat to liberal democracy, this makes his ideology that much more powerful and legitimate in the mind of a person who identifies liberal democracy with “Cultural Marxism”, “Political Correctness”, and “Eurabia”.

In “Constructing Dark Celebrity,” Dargeset notes that Hillel Nosssek has theorized that national media in the wake of a domestic terrorist attack typically plays the role of assuring the populace that the attack does not represent an existential threat to the nation's way of life, and returning national moods to normal⁶⁶. It is also noted that the media runs the risk of “giving in” to the perpetrator or perpetrators of the attack and not only spreading their message but also contributing to the climate of fear they sought to promote. The media also runs the risk of emboldening people who ascribe to the ideology of the perpetrators, which may have seemed unlikely in 2011 but as right wing populist parties have made significant inroads in Europe and anti-Muslim populist rhetoric has become increasingly popular in the United States, a similar attack today would produce a very different media response.

Even in 2011, some right wing political commentators and leaders made remarks on Breivik's ideas that were clearly outside the bounds of liberal democracy and its discourse. Francesco Speroni, a member of Italy's right wing Lega Nord party, famously stated that Breivik's ideas were “in defense of Western

⁶⁵ Townsend and McVeigh,.

⁶⁶ Dargeset, 78.

civilization”, prompting a swift backlash amongst his own party.⁶⁷ Another member of the Lega Nord, Mario Borghezio, was quoted as saying the killings were possibly staged to discredit far right thinkers in Europe, specifically those who embraced the “Eurabia” theory.²⁴

What is most interesting about the question of whether Breivik's views are within the bounds of “liberal democracy” is the question of why they remain intelligible and easily recognized despite their supposed fringe status. What this should suggest to any reader is the fact that a reversal of any concept will still follow and reproduce its internal logic, and that while Breivik may have chosen to be the “ultimate villain” of 21st century Norway and Europe overall, he did so within its symbolic vocabulary, attacking a government building and then striking at a highly vulnerable and symbolically important youth summer camp for the Labor Party. Again, Breivik's attack was intelligible within the paradigms of Norwegian politics the same way the 9/11 attacks were intelligible to their American audience. This suggests that Breivik was fluent in the televisual discourse of modernity’s mediated world, and that his attack succeeded as a communicative act. To return to Stuart Hall’s theory, Breivik’s attacks were encoded effectively.

In “Norway attacks: How Far Right Views Created Anders Behring Breivik”, Breivik's links to far-right ideologies and groups were covered. Linking a far-right terrorist to far-right parties is a predictable rhetorical device, but at the end of the article is a highly important passage. The article cites nameless “experts” as claiming that Breivik is neither a lone wolf nor insane, and that Europe ignores his ideas and possibly similar actors at its own peril⁶⁸. Breivik famously said that one purpose of his attacks was to inspire other “European patriots”, so this is an excellent example of Breivik's message and ideology transmitted directly into mass media via his actions.

⁶⁷ J Hooper, “Ex-Berlusconi minister defends Anders Behring Breivik”. *The Guardian*. July 27, 2011.

⁶⁸ P Beaumont, “Norway attacks: At least 92 killed in Oslo and Utøya island”. *The Guardian* July 23, 2011.

Media coverage of the attacks in some ways resisted his narrative, and in other ways devolved into a Rorschach test (every political group predictably found a way to blame their opponents for it). Ultimately, Breivik demonstrated an adept knowledge of political and cultural symbols and managed to make a specific point of far-right populism as a challenge to liberal democracy. Following that Breivik's attacks became a Rorschach Test in which different interest groups and thinkers found the ideas of their adversaries reflected in the attack and blamed misogyny, Islamophobia, “madness”, or other factors. This is the strongest evidence for the attack's communicative intelligibility. Breivik successfully encoded the various cultural antagonisms in his thought into the attack, and these antagonisms were reproduced in mass media coverage of the shooting and bombing, letting feminists and multiculturalists know that they were under attack. By a deft employment of the code of 21st century European politics, Breivik delivered a violent far right challenge to what he perceived as multiculturalist hegemony and the forces which he saw as his prime antagonists. Returning to Stuart Hall's theories of encoding and decoding, we consider the narrative of Breivik's attacks as a “threat to liberal democracy and Norwegian values”⁶⁹ as the dominant/hegemonic position, the various interest groups viewing the attack as directed at them as a serious of negotiated positions, and people with far-right views consuming the media coverage as an oppositional position. It is telling to consider a reversal of this scheme, considering the oppositional position of Breivik's far right audience as a dominant reading of the attack itself as filtered through mass media outlets. Again, while Breivik's attack is an inversion of mainstream Norwegian values, it follows the same internal logic and is intelligible within its paradigm.

One common trope regarding Breivik is the question of his possible mental illness, which is an effort to remove him from political discourse and deprive his 2011 attacks of their meaning as political speech. There exists a wide range of research on the concept of mental illness as an incompatibility in

⁶⁹ Beaumont.

systems of meaning between an individual and their society, but the characterization of Breivik as a “paranoid schizophrenic” seems odd in that the level of planning necessary to carry out his attacks seems highly implausible for a person with serious mental illness, and beyond that it appears that Breivik clearly understands modern Europe's systems of meaning as clearly as he rejects them, as evidenced by how many of his ideas were directly reflected in mass media in the wake of his attacks. Most damningly, Breivik's ideas and actions are intelligible within the paradigms of his society. Breivik's attacks can be demonstrated to be meaningful communication, and the extent to which media discourse has reproduced his message and spread his name and ideas across the globe shows the extent to which he was successful. The United States has experienced not only mass shootings which are thematically and rhetorically like the 2011 Utoya shootings, but also mass shooters who have directly named Breivik as an influence.

If anything is clear, it is that Breivik has had very few political positions that cannot be identified within the broad spectrum of the European right, and that while many right-wing populists eschew an explicit Frankfurt School conspiracy theory, the idea of elites forcing a social agenda as well as immigration on a homogenous national subject is even less of a fringe idea in 2016 as it was in 2011. The heavy media coverage of Breivik's attack is not only due to it having happened in Norway and the high death toll, but also the extent to which Breivik seized on the symbolic vocabulary of mass media.

CHAPTER 2: ANDERS BREIVIK'S ATTACKS ON OSLO AND UTOYA

Breivik's political positions being what they are, it remains to be demonstrated how he sought to articulate them to the world. Here, we will contend with these questions. In *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process*, Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjorgo use Ander's Breivik's 2011 attacks in Oslo and on Utoya as a case study of how terrorists select their targets and plan their attacks. These notions are relevant to the questions at hand in that the execution of the attack and the concrete steps taken in Breivik's acts constitute political speech to the same extent as his media activities. The process via which Breivik

selected his targets and formulated his manifesto, rather than being the communicative aspect of his terrorist activities, can obscure the more immediately communicative aspect of the attacks themselves. The real question at hand is at which point Breivik's political speech crossed over from text-based communication into communicative acts of violence, and what exactly caused this paradigm shift. These pages will also demonstrate that, while Breivik's ideology changed over time, his communicative acts and efforts remained within the same basic paradigms of identity and violence in turn of the century Europe. Through a textual and semiotic analysis of Breivik's activities, this chapter will uncover the narrative of white masculine identity against a perceived feminine oppressor which defined Breivik's thought and actions in 2011.

In Hemmingby's account, Breivik's original plans went deeply awry in the process of the attack. Breivik planned to upload his manifesto and a video message and forward them to a series of media outlets, which took longer than expected and fundamentally changed the symbolic value of his selected targets. Breivik was also unable to detonate a fertilizer bomb in Oslo when it would have been most destructive, and was unable to arrive on Utoya in time to assassinate former prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.⁷⁰ These logistical hurdles, while not fatal to the attack itself, significantly diminished the symbolic value of Breivik's attack. Henceforth, the hiccups and setbacks in Breivik's communicative terrorist acts will be understood as noise in his transmission. Hemmingby's account marks the time of the fertilizer bomb explosion as 3:25 PM, towards the end of the day on a Friday, when most government personnel were either on holiday or had left for the day.⁷¹ While casualties were minimal, the symbolic value of destroying the building and detonating a bomb in downtown Oslo at all was historically unprecedented in modern Norway. In Breivik's thought, the Norwegian state represented an oppressive "Cultural Marxist" hegemony,

⁷⁰ Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjorgo, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Strategy: Anders B Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 61.

⁷¹ Hemmingby, 64.

and the tower block where the bomb was detonated houses numerous important government buildings.⁷² By detonating a bomb in the heart of the Norwegian state, Breivik not only achieved the basic goal of attacking the Norwegian government apparatus, but also demonstrated what he took to be the impotency and feminine weakness of the Norwegian state in the face of an “Islamic invasion” and the perceived threat of Muslim violence both in Norway's inner cities and in the guise of Islamist terrorism. Breivik’s bombing attack made the point that other “European patriots” such as himself, more accurately referred to as white nationalists in the American context, could quite easily mount attacks on the European security state.

The authors make the point that security at the site at the time was minimal, especially as compared to a government building in another European city or in the United States.⁷³ Earlier in the book, they make the point that Breivik may have selected a Norwegian target because of the nation's comparatively minimal counterterrorism infrastructure and low security even in its most core areas. This feeds back into Breivik's indictment of the Norwegian state as insufficiently masculine. From a psychoanalytic perspective, we can theorize that Breivik resented the fact that the Norwegian state was a “soft target”, viewing it in metaphorical terms as a soft maternal body. The modern welfare state has often been identified as a “nanny state” in contrast to the paternal authoritarian states of the past, and as we will see later Breivik's lifelong angst in his relationship with his mother is certainly a factor in his hate for the Norwegian state⁷⁴. In terms of the immediate response to the explosion, the police and security forces were so undermanned and unprepared for a terrorist attack that all their personnel and resources had to be immediately re-routed toward grappling with the attack, a factor which allowed Breivik to escape and continue his activities⁷⁵. Media coverage of the Norwegian security state's impotence in the face of Breivik's attack plays into his narrative, as does the global media's horror that such a thing could happen in modern Norway. Breivik set out to

⁷² Breivik, 1135.

⁷³ Hemmingby, 63.

⁷⁴ Borchgrevink, 205.

⁷⁵ Hemmingby, 65.

make the point that the Norwegian security state was weak and incompetent, which he achieved succinctly in his bomb attack on it.

Breivik then drove to the land side of Utoya, and arrived at 4:26 PM. He was disguised as a police officer, and upon his arrival explained to a Labour party official that he had been sent by the Oslo Police Security Service to secure the island following the bombing attack.⁷⁶ He was then ferried to the island, during which he gathered information about the security arrangements at the camp. Most importantly, he learned that an off-duty police officer was the main person in charge of security, and was introduced to him upon arrival. The police officer became suspicious of Breivik, at which point Breivik suggested that they proceed to the main headquarters of the camp to ascertain the parameters of the security situation⁷⁷. It was at this point that Breivik drew his firearm and fired a shot at the police officer.⁷⁸ He proceeded to spend the next 75 minutes walking across the island shooting everyone in his field of vision, indiscriminately except for a few extremely young camp-goers whose lives he spared due to their age. The authors make the point that Breivik expected Labour Party members in their 20s, and was unprepared for the comparatively younger age of most of the participants. This is yet another “unknown unknown” Breivik faced during the attack. Breivik himself was in his 20s at the time, and the notion that he was anticipating party members his own age suggests that he was looking to attack his peers. That he was confronted with a group of juveniles instead can in some sense be taken as noise in his transmission, while at the same time he later stated that the killing of juveniles was an act of maximum cruelty which was necessary to make his point.⁷⁹ In short, Breivik quickly retooled his own rhetorical strategy in response to his new circumstances, and managed to keep his attack within the communicative framework he was working from.

⁷⁶ Hemmingby, 64.

⁷⁷ Hemmingby, 64.

⁷⁸ Hemmingby, 68.

⁷⁹ Brian Whelan, "Norway Gunman Says Massacre Was 'cruel but Necessary ..." *The Sunday Times*. July 24, 2011.

The police response to the shooting was like the bombing in that the police were largely unprepared and failed to apprehend Breivik or stop the attack until a much later point. Breivik himself made a call to the police, identifying himself as the leader of the resistance to the Islamicization of Europe and a member of the “Knights Templar.”⁸⁰ The police also were under the impression that the attack was being executed by multiple perpetrators, so even after Breivik was neutralized and apprehended they continued to search for more terrorists. They did not in fact find more shooters, but found 70 slain victims and 33 more people who sustained injuries in the shooting. Breivik was attempting to mislead the police and introduce noise into their communications, but there may have been a deeper meaning to his claim that he was part of a larger organization. Far-right parties have consistently existed in post-war Europe, and have historically gone to great lengths to sanitize their rhetoric and conceal certain aspects of their activities due to strict hate speech laws. Thus, the threat of a network of far-right terror cells carried and continues to carry a certain existential dimension in modern Europe. Breivik wrote at numerous points that the aim of his attack was to jump start an insurrection of far-right populists across Europe, and we can take his claim that such a movement existed as an effort to create it by naming it⁸¹. The “Knights Templar” as he defines it appears extensively in his manifesto, and it appears that he attempted to write it into existence. Whether future mass shooters committing similar acts acted in concert with Breivik or not, after his claim that he was part of a larger movement any other far right terrorist attacks in Europe could possibly be arranged into a pattern by European mass media and linked to Breivik. Many commentators in fact did attach Breivik's attack to far right populist parties and ideals in Europe, and did in fact suggest that his attack would be the first of a series of such attacks. Once again, on this front Breivik's communicative act was successful. In effect, European media coverage of the attack fell victim to Breivik's own narrative and allowed him to coopt all right-wing terrorism in Europe under the auspice of his own personal mission. In short, for any

⁸⁰ Hemmingby, 71.

⁸¹ Breivik, 939.

terrorist attack to succeed in its mission, as an act of communication it must prove intelligible to mass media audiences and/or the state.

Overall, the primary question for media commentators in the wake of such an atrocity has been simply why someone would do such a thing. Since 2011, a body of literature has appeared which trace Breivik's life retroactively from the attack itself. Some texts have located the causality for Breivik's turn to terrorism in Breivik's own background himself, whereas others have located the blame entirely within larger social and historical trends. The most successful and cogent arguments have of course synthesized the two, and shown how the factors in Breivik's own biography coincided with his own historical reality to produce the attacks as an outcome. If we consider Breivik not as an anomaly but as a subject whose experience and ideas are historically conditioned, we see that his life is in many ways a microcosm of several seismic shifts in the histories of Norway and Europe overall.

Anders Behring Breivik was born in Oslo in 1979 to Jens David Breivik, a civil engineer, and Wenche Behring, a nurse. His parents divorced when he was a year old, at which point he and his mother returned to Oslo from London where his father was stationed as a diplomat.⁸² Aside from the divorce, which is a common outcome for families in modern Europe, we locate the first point of trouble in Breivik's life at age 4, when his mother was under investigation by social services, and there was talk of his being removed from her care.⁸³ This was 1983, during the 5 years of Kare Willoch's Conservative government, in which the Norwegian economy was deregulated, mass media especially. This becomes an important factor later, in that more foreign media was available in the 1990s than in Norway's past, and American popular culture was thus more influential. Most accounts paint a picture of Breivik's mother as a very troubled woman, and inappropriate behavior toward and in the proximity of the young Breivik appears prominently in most descriptions of the period. The SSBU report is quoted as describing Wenche Behring

⁸² Borchgrevink, 38.

⁸³ Richard Orange, "Anders Behring Breivik's mother 'sexualised' him when he was four" *The Telegraph*. October 07, 2012.

as a very troubled woman with a borderline personality, and most tellingly asserts that she “projects her primitive aggressive and sexual fantasies” onto the young Anders”⁸⁴. Aage Borchgrevink is quoted as saying that Breivik's mother saw him as a violent adult man, even though he was a four-year-old child.⁸⁵

Borchgrevink suggests that young Anders was vilified and abused by his mother solely based on his gender, and that she projected onto his sexed body her own troubled feelings about men and masculinity.⁸⁶ Breivik would go on to write not only on the emasculation of European men, but also the extent to which liberal feminist parenting had “feminised” him in adulthood.⁸⁷ Returning to Breivik's identification of the Norwegian state with an oppressive maternal body, we cannot ignore that the bulk of his upbringing took place during the Gro Harlem Brundtland government, in a period in which sweeping social reforms focused on supporting women both at work and in the home. Brundtland's tenure as Prime Minister was marked by historians as a seismic shift for gender roles in Norway, a shift which Breivik identifies as inextricably linked to his mother's abusive treatment of him when he was young.⁸⁸ Breivik's experience of having violence and sexuality projected onto him solely due to his sex also contributed to his own self-concept as a man, his difficulties interacting with women, and ultimately his stylized and highly sensational conceptions of violence and sexuality. We can also see traces of these experiences in his manifesto, specifically where he deals with gender issues in the abstract and uses his mother and sister as case studies.⁸⁹

His mother's abuse may have shaped his sentiments on the modern Norwegian state, but this alone is not the fulcrum of his choice to detonate a bomb in the heart of it. Theorists of communication make

⁸⁴ Orange.

⁸⁵ Borchgrevink, 40.

⁸⁶ Borchgrevink, 40.

⁸⁷ Breivik, 1387.

⁸⁸ Borchgrevink, 205.

⁸⁹ Breivik, 1172.

the point that communication depends on a cooperative principle, which states that two people must presume cooperation on each other's parts to meaningfully communicate. Not only did Breivik internalize an entirely different system of signs than his peers in his early interactions with his mother, he also identified his social setting as hostile and abusive to him. Hence, he perceived himself as unable to meaningfully communicate with his society and his peers, and did not perceive a principle of cooperation to be in effect. He assimilated to a different set of ideas than the official mainstream “mass line”, but still his thought and expressions remain inside what is intelligible to other Norwegians and Europeans.

The next epistemic break in Breivik's development were his teen years, in which he became involved in hip hop youth culture and the practice of writing graffiti. Breivik associated with many youths of immigrant backgrounds during this period, and adopted an image which he paradoxically would later come to identify with the downfall of Europe and his personal antithesis. While it may seem contradictory for a young man to identify with rap music and its signifiers and then come to embrace far right ideology, as Aage Borchgrevink explains, the two worldviews served a very similar purpose in Breivik's life.⁹⁰ Breivik's troubled relationship with his mother contributed to an antisocial personality and distrust of authority figures (specifically female ones, note his hate for Gro Harlem Brundtland), and both the “Kebab Norwegian” and rap lyrics of his teen years and the far-right populism of his 20s place a heavy emphasis not only on a direct challenge to social authority but also assertive masculinity and power.⁹¹ Breivik, throughout his writing, continuously associated Muslim immigrant youths in Norway with masculinity and virility, in contrast with the “emasculatation” of native European men.⁹² Hip hop culture in the 1990s was also largely predicated on a notion of “youth in revolt” against society and its artifices. Rap music and graffiti art are in many ways direct subversions of the conventions of “traditional” art and music.

⁹⁰ Borchgrevink, 78.

⁹¹ Breivik, 1207.

⁹² Borchgrevink, 25.

Much like terrorist attacks, however, rap lyrics and graffiti come to be interpreted within the paradigm of the societies they attack, and are only intelligible to mainstream audiences and critics by their grounding within these paradigms.

For example, for NWA's "Fuck tha Police" to shock and appall white listeners, the song must be in some way intelligible to them in the first place. Breivik looked to rebel against the Norwegian social order and his own feelings of emasculation and impotence via assuming the role of the virile and powerful "Other". While he of course rejected the ideas of his schoolteachers and the dominant political rhetoric of 1990s Norway, the concepts he used to develop his new identity came from that same society, and fit within its paradigms.

Breivik adopted at least two such forms of subjectivity. While of course rap music and the writings of Fjordmann are wildly different, as perceived and assimilated by Breivik they served largely the same purpose. What is most important to note is that Breivik's political viewpoints and modes of self-expression throughout his life never departed from the same symbolic lexicon. Norwegian manhood is identified with emasculation and weakness, Muslim immigrants with masculinity and power, and the Norwegian state as an oppressive and evil maternal body. Far right populist rhetoric and many rap songs, while they critique it from two presumably different sides, always focus their ire on "the state", "the system", "our society", and the like. While Breivik certainly made different value judgments about immigrant youth in Oslo later in his life, the set of attributes he ascribed to the three forces (Norwegians, immigrants, the state) remained consistent.

The subject of graffiti is itself important to consider here in terms of its significance. Graffiti writers, especially in the period in which Breivik was active in the form, mostly seek to deface public property or businesses with a specialized signature, or "tag", which denotes their artistic skill.⁹³ Public or difficult

⁹³ Borchgrevink, 78.

to access targets are highly prized, as is a highly intricate or unique piece. Graffiti as most commonly understood was developed by black and Latino youth in 1960s New York, and is often associated with the city's decline in the latter half of the 20th century. Graffiti is employed by “Taxi Driver” protagonist Travis Bickle as an example of the social ills plaguing 1970s New York, which, as many scholars have pointed out, are racially coded. Breivik's youthful identification with hip hop youth culture and later switch to white supremacist views, while it does in some ways denote a reversal, demonstrates that he never left a specific grammar of cultural images of identity and masculinity. Graffiti as an art form has been identified by media and law enforcement as antisocial behavior which disrupts the visual and material order of a normally functioning society.⁹⁴ As Breivik identified Norwegian state and society with an oppressive maternal force, in his teen years it stands to reason that he would adopt a rhetorical closed fist against its smoothly functioning hegemony.

It is important here to note the significance of graffiti art in the urban spaces of late 20th century Europe, specifically its relationship with minority and immigrant youths, as well as the modern European state. For this pursuit, we will consider the most primary of sources, Breivik himself. Breivik wrote, in an imagined interview, about his involvement with graffiti and hip hop youth culture during his “vulnerable years.” Breivik explained that it was easy for him to gain respect and notoriety in the hip hop community in West Oslo, because it was the more privileged part of the city, with comparatively fewer immigrants, and that in this crowd he was prominent.⁹⁵ Breivik then moved on to explain that graffiti as an activity was an open act of defiance of the Oslo city government, and Norwegian civil society and that the graffiti scene had a high proximity to both far left political groups in Oslo (SOS Racisme and Blitz), and local immigrant gangs as well.⁹⁶ It is implied that these early experiences with far-left politics and immigrant

⁹⁴ Nancy Macdonald, *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity, and Identity in London and New York* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

⁹⁵ Borchgrevink, 104.

⁹⁶ Breivik, 1388.

youths in Oslo were important to Breivik's development, and he recounts that experiences with the hostility of his friends to Norwegian culture and customs were formative with respect to his own feelings about Norwegian culture and its importance.⁹⁷ Breivik then explained a collusion he perceives between Marxist organizations and Islamic gangs, links them to the organized gang rape of Norwegian women, and then tacitly implies the complicity of the state in promoting policies that would produce these outcomes. He also makes the point that native Norwegians who allied with each other to fight against these practices were labeled “neo-Nazis” and subject to arrest and social persecution.⁹⁸ While Breivik's explanations of this period of his life may be marked by revisionism, the basic themes of his writing are clearly on display. An emphasis on masculinity and a general air of antisocial behavior were clearly the main points of appeal for Breivik, as far as graffiti was concerned. Breivik’s use of the term “native Norwegians” is important here in that he is referring to whiteness, and it is important to note that he transitioned from an identity center around masculinity and power but hostile to whiteness to an identity which centers both whiteness and masculinity.

In his activities in the world of graffiti, Breivik displayed a willingness to attack “society” and articulate his own subjectivity. In a sense, his graffiti pieces were early precursors to his later attacks on what he perceived as the very same society. Lacking the language to express his subjectivity through the institutions and discourses of Norway at the end of the 20th century (recall that the child welfare authorities were unable to stop his mother's abuse toward him), Breivik subverted and attacked his perceived authorities via the material rhetoric of his graffiti.

Breivik's graffiti career, however, was to come to an end when he was caught by police and collaborated with them in exchange for leniency. The ostracizing he faced, in combination with increased racial hostility in Oslo and a few high-profile cases of alleged sexual violence against Norwegian women

⁹⁷ Breivik, 1389.

⁹⁸ Breivik, 1389.

and girls by youths of immigrant backgrounds, began to push him in a different direction.⁹⁹ An important avenue to consider regarding graffiti in Oslo is its intersection with Oslo's developing gang culture in the 1990s. While certain modes of representation and ideas about street gang were exported to Norway via American mass media, that does not mean that Oslo's gang culture was somehow less corporeally real, or that it did not play an important role in young people's lives. Borchgrevink speaks of the advent of the "Tasen Gang", a group composed of youths from a predominantly white neighborhood in Oslo who developed a reputation for being "tougher than the immigrants."¹⁰⁰ and in some cases later gravitated toward skinhead imagery and far right ideas. Rather than identifying masculinity with non-Norwegian identity and antisociality again with immigrant youth gangs, Breivik was now given a model of masculinity which asserted itself both against "Norwegian society" and immigrants themselves, in that it centered and emphasized whiteness. The Oslo of the 1990s is described by Borchgrevink as a context in which racial animosities and rhetoric came to the fold in an unprecedented way, closely mirroring the racial angst of 90s America and Great Britain.¹⁰¹ Borchgrevink also details how West Oslo, historically white, saw an influx of immigrant families and an expansion of its public housing, which contributed to the animus and conflict amongst its young people.

It is also important to note how Breivik himself, as quoted by Borchgrevink, conceptualized 1990s Oslo. For Breivik, the Oslo of the period was rife with violence, specifically sexual violence directed against Norwegian women and girls by immigrant youths.¹⁰²¹⁰³ The metaphor of the rape of Norway as projected onto the bodies of both Norwegian women and immigrant men, figures heavily not only into Breivik's later ideological statements, but also appears in other national contexts across Europe. One need

⁹⁹ Borchgrevink, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Borchgrevink, 98.

¹⁰¹ Borchgrevink, 86.

¹⁰² Borchgrevink, 99.

¹⁰³ Borchgrevink, 25.

only look at media coverage of this and last years' migrant crises to notice a heavy emphasis on images of sexual violence and concerns about its perpetration against native populations.

This is another moment in which Breivik's biography intersects with his historical moment, namely an association of victimhood and weakness with femininity, and concerns over masculinity and national identity. Breivik's Norwegian political class is either feminine or feminized, as contrasted with the Muslim immigrant who is viewed as strong, virile, and dangerous. In Breivik's writing, the standard “top uses the bottom against the middle” takes on a strongly gendered and racialized character, positing the political subject as a white Christian Norwegian male beset on all sides. Breivik's concerns about his own masculinity are well documented, and it was reported that he underwent plastic surgery to make his chin appear more “manly”, and used anabolic steroids in his weightlifting regimen to become more physically powerful.¹⁰⁴ About his own childhood, Breivik wrote that he did not approve of the “super liberal” parenting style, making the point that he felt it responsible for “feminizing” him¹⁰⁵. Breivik’s thought is marked by a complex matrix of ideas in which masculinity, race, and white identity combine in various permutations. While the narratives may be coherent, there is one basic theme that can be identified.

Deeply contemplating his manifesto, we see that Breivik's writing began to suggest that a view of the preferential treatment of immigrants by the Norwegian state relative to the Norwegian population as a case of unrequited love. Breivik felt that the emasculated Norwegian man lacks some essential quality embodied in the Muslim immigrants, and it is not too far of a leap to take his complaints about competing with them for Norwegian women to imagine him competing with his imagined Muslim enemies for the heart of the Norwegian mother-state itself.

¹⁰⁴ Daily Mail Reporter, "'Hitler Would Have Put Him on a Poster': Norwegian Killer Had Plastic Surgery to Look More Aryan, Claims Intelligence Chief," *Mail Online*, July 31, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Breivik, 1387.

Regarding his relationships with women, biographers assert that he had difficulty with romantic partners and interacting with women in social settings. At one point, he used a foreign dating service to meet a woman from Belarus who came to Oslo to live with him for a time, though their relationship was ultimately unsuccessful¹⁰⁶. Personal accounts detail how Breivik's affect with women was constricted and unusual, an echo of the child care workers and their concerns about 4-year-old Anders' constricted affect and strange behavior. Breivik's difficulties with women, far from being the “root cause” for his motivations to commit a mass shooting, are symptomatic of the basic issues he felt he faced in his experience of modern Norway. Namely, he found it difficult to adapt to the discourse of his environment and express himself in a language others could understand. Breivik's personal writings in some cases attributed his issues with women to the huge shift in Norwegian gender politics in the 1980s, and posited that things between men and women were made difficult by a blurring of gender roles and expectations. In his manifesto, Breivik makes it a point to note the experiences of his mother and sister with STIs, attributing his sister's experience with pelvic inflammatory disease and that of his mother with genital herpes to their supposed moral failures, again returning to shifting gender expectations in Norwegian history and feminine villainy as the root of Norway's social problems.¹⁰⁷

The “feminized” Norwegian (white) male, in the mind of Breivik, found himself unable to defend Norwegian women against sexual violence perpetrated by Muslim immigrants, also experienced diminished sexual desirability by comparison.¹⁰⁸ Breivik's attacks, as he has explained in media activities and interviews, was an effort to jump start a movement by European patriots to fight back against multiculturalism and Islam, and in some senses, reassert a besieged European (white) masculinity.¹⁰⁹ At this point,

¹⁰⁶ Aasne Seirstad. *One of Us: The Story of Anders Breivik and the Massacre in Norway* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015) 109.

¹⁰⁷ Breivik, 1171.

¹⁰⁸ Breivik, 347.

¹⁰⁹ Breivik, 348.

we must consider the dark possibility of a causal link in Breivik's mind between “the rape of Europa” and the diminished sexual desirability of white men. Is it possible that Breivik suspected “Europa” of desiring sexual violence from the Muslim other which he himself was not “man enough” to enact? As abhorrent as this idea is, one need not stray too far into the more lurid corners of the internet to find frustrated men discussing rape as “the natural sexual order”, and claiming that white women secretly fantasize about Arab and African men's inherent power and virility. At this point, it is important to recall that, rather than the ravings of a madman, these are all concepts which are intelligible within modern Western culture, and appear in film and literature as well as political discourse. As abhorrent as his ideas and actions were, it can never be forgotten that they exist within the abovementioned “code” of political and cultural symbolism.

Rather than conceiving of the mass shooting as the return of some repressed primordial urge, we will take the focus away from sexual frustration and move it to a perceived failed effort to communicate, followed by a perceived successful communicative act. If we return to the theories on terrorism as communication, we can see that failed communication and a turn to different mediums is a much more productive interpretation of the mass shooting than misdirected libidinal feelings. In the case of Anders Breivik, we observe a series of epistemic ruptures in which his efforts to communicate with other people ultimately failed and he embraced other mediums. Returning to the overarching rhetoric of the mass shooting as media event and its ancestors in film and literature, we see again and again a white male subject who finds themselves unable to enter the discourse of their environment and looks to the physical rhetoric of violence to assert themselves. Just as Travis Bickle is unable to understand or fit into a 1970s New York in which whiteness and maleness is increasingly de-centered, Anders Breivik finds himself unable to achieve his vision of the good life in the Norway of the 1990s. We also recall Travis Bickle's attempted rescue of a teen girl from a life of prostitution, and the way she initially rejects his savior's mission. Much

like Breivik secretly suspects Europa of desiring its own rape at the hands of the Muslim Ummah, Travis Bickle suspects Jodie Foster's character of wanting to be prostituted in a New York where white masculinity is increasingly de-centered. In both cases, a narrative of heterosexual relations pervades which focuses on male agency and fulfillment, and in their own way both men conclude their stories as heroes in their own minds.

Accepting the premise that Breivik's attack can be interpreted as an act of communication, we are still left with the question of where to locate the discursive point of departure from Breivik as “normal person” and Breivik as “terrorist”. Rather than the factor which finally led to his radicalization, we will consider the point at which he finally lacked the language to articulate his subjectivity by any means other than an act of terrorism. Breivik must be read not only in terms of his biography, but also his historical moment and the larger trends which inform his political views as well as his personal experience.

Returning to the earlier discussion of Kare Willoch's tenure as Norway's Prime Minister, we can recall a series of important developments in Norway during Breivik's childhood. Willoch was the leader of Norway from 1981 to 1986, and the changes in Norwegian governance he and his party initiated not only complicate predominating narratives about Norway, but also demonstrate a crucial missing link between American media and Anders Breivik's terrorist attacks. First and foremost, Willoch was a lifelong skeptic of Nordic social democratic policies, and was instrumental in their rollback in several cases. An economist by trade, Willoch famously dissolved the state monopoly on telecommunications and other media, a process of deregulation which not only greatly weakened the state's ability to control media content, but also allowed the proliferation of cable television for Norwegian families. This created a wide difference between Norway and its Scandinavian neighbors regarding commercially produced content, and given the domination of American film and television globally, meant that Norwegian consumers had more access to American media than Swedes, for example. Curiously, rather than falling under the global

communications regime by default, it appears that Norway's mass media infrastructure was integrated with that of the United States as far back as the 1980s, meaning that Anders Breivik was given similar referents to his American counterparts because of this historical development. In his adolescence, Breivik could very easily have seen the American film "Robocop" on television when his Swedish neighbors could not. Considering these facts, it cannot be a coincidence that a nation with such a great integration with American telecommunications could produce an American style mass shooting. Returning to Thompson's arguments on how the modern subject constructs their subjectivity from the building blocks they glean from mass media. Considering the prominent role of gun violence in American media and Norway's early integration with American mass media, we can conclude that gun violence as a symbol entered Breivik's consciousness early on. Breivik is a case where a somewhat common experience (issues with women, anxieties about race and power) becomes integrated into a global mass media discourse of white male identity.

Another key element of Willoch's tenure as Norway's leader is the introduction of market-oriented economic reforms and an end to government intervention in credit markets. Along with concerns about immigration and cultural identity, many scholars have identified these neoliberal reforms as a major fulcrum of the rising popularity of right wing populist parties in Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia. Bjorn Fryklund claims that as a rule, populist parties arise in conditions where sections of the population feel slighted by political elites. Fryklund's research shows that the Progress Party, to which Breivik had briefly belonged, saw its popularity increase from 14.9% to 22.6% in Norwegian parliamentary elections between 2001 and 2005.¹¹⁰ Magnus E. Marsdal explains the social composition of the Progress Party and notes that, rather than being a party of dispossessed workers, as the narrative about right wing European parties

¹¹⁰ Bjorn Fryklund, "Populism – Changes over Time and Space: A Comparative and Retrospective Analysis of Populist Parties in the Nordic Countries from 1965 to 2001." In *Right Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 351-362.

goes, the Progress Party can be much more accurately described as a party of private sector workers.¹¹¹ For context, we recall that the public sector employs a greater percentage of all workers in Norway than in the United States, and hence the voting patterns common to public sector workers in the United States can be somewhat observed in Norway to a much greater degree historically. However, Kare Willoch's deregulation of the Norwegian economy and subsequent expansion of the private sector meant that increased popularity for the Progress Party has a clear historical context. Somewhat paradoxically, we can see enthusiasm for free market ideals combined derision for their outcomes (immigration, a diminished social safety net, a renegotiated ethno-national identity) forming an important core of Norwegian populist ideology. Controlling for questions of degree, tactics, sophistication, and the like, we can firmly situate Breivik's ideas within this context.

The dominance of the Labor Party in Norway over the course of several decades and far reaching shifts in both culture and policy created a relatively homogenous self-concept in Norway.¹¹² Not only that, a specific model of multiculturalist ideology and immigration policy has been dominant in Norwegian politics since the 1990s, and Labor Party officials had been working on promoting a new Norwegian self-concept which included immigrants and refugees.¹¹³ In this context, right wing populist parties have become the predominant visible force with a political rhetoric which challenges mainstream European multiculturalism, and elites both in the EU and national governments have struggled to shake the association of multiculturalism with the agendas of political elites.¹¹⁴ Multiculturalism has also been tied to globalization and increased flow of capital between the global core and periphery, which has created a supposed link between economic inequality and multiculturalist ideas which the European establishment has also

¹¹¹ Magnus E Marsdal, "Loud Values, Muffled Interests: Third Way Social Democracy and Right-Wing Populism." In *Right Wing Populism in Europe*, 75-90.

¹¹² Borchgrevink, 133.

¹¹³ Borchgrevink, 133.

¹¹⁴ Mohammed Abbas, "Analysis: Norway Massacre Exposes Incendiary Immigration Issue." *Reuters*. 2011.

been hard pressed to shake when criticized by right populist parties. Indeed, immigrants primarily came to Norway to fill a need for labor, until the government stopped issuing work visas in 1975.¹¹⁵

Social elites have been accused of using immigrants to lower the wages of native (re: white) workers, and refugees often cannot legally work, which opens proponents of asylum policies to the criticism that they import “Labour voters” and people who do not contribute to Norwegian or European societies more broadly. Noting that persons of immigrant background are represented heavily in the Labour Party’s leadership and voter base, this point can only be debated from a perspective of causation. In an age of increased austerity, social instability, terrorism, and in some ways, a rollback of what European citizens identify as the core aspects of their societies, right wing populist parties and ideologies have seized the difficulties faced by middle class Europeans and project them onto the cultural sphere. Most major European nations have seen right wing parties making large inroads in their elections, in some cases paradoxically running on the platforms one would expect from the European left. Social protections, environmental policy, opposition to austerity, an end to NATO treaty obligations, withdrawal from the War on Terror, and opposition to global free trade are common positions for the new right populist parties. Some scholars have even remarked that by abandoning many of their key positions in a pursuit to ally themselves with global finance and business in the wake of the cold war, many of the European labor and left parties have effectively handed many of their key positions to right wing populist parties.

This of course is not to say that right wing populist rhetoric or violence is somehow a “natural” outcome of a monadic neoliberal hegemony, or that European citizens have some latent predisposition to fascism, or that a young man unable to integrate into his social reality will “naturally” commit an act of mass violence in response to his difficulties. Returning to John Thompson's *Media and Modernity*, we recall that the modern subject has a limited array of images and concepts available in the construction of

¹¹⁵ Unni Wikan, *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 39.

their own identity, and that the images and concepts which proliferate most readily in mass media will serve as the building blocks for the subjectivity of the average person. This is to say that rather than positing neoliberal ideology and policy and right wing populist nationalism as the only two options for 21st century European politics, we accept that they are the two main models available in mass media to the European subject. Beyond that, the two ideologies can be seen to constitute a complementary and cohesive whole, rather than being opposites.

Much like a well-adjusted happy life as a heterosexual middle class man and a vengeful domestic terrorist were not the only two directions in which Anders Breivik could have seen his life go in, these were the two options he perceived most readily in his media consumption, even in very murky terms or via chains of referent images and signifiers. Without a healthy language or ideological platform with which to critique his experiences and personal troubles, he resorted to the language of ultimate subversion and transgression in 2011 Norway, a domestic terrorist attack. In his court proceedings Breivik named himself “the worst monster since Quisling”, and in some ways, his attack can be read as a tragic and abhorrent continuation of his juvenile graffiti career, the ultimate antisocial transgression. More than anything, we must recall that his attack and his ideas were ultimately intelligible, and fit within the code or discourse of 21st century Norway and Europe. As many of his ideas were reproduced in the media coverage of his attacks, his programme was meaningfully decoded and reproduced. While Breivik's attack shocked and appalled us, it remained within the rhetorical paradigm of Western society. The signifiers of whiteness, masculinity, power, and violence were readily identifiable by the mass media, and as such he accomplished the exact rhetorical effect he set out to.

CHAPTER 3: PERSONAL AND POLITICAL IN THE RHETORIC OF ELLIOT RODGER

Three years later, on the other side of the Atlantic, Breivik's attacks repeated themselves in Isla Vista, California. On May 23rd, 2014, Elliot Rodger stabbed three men to death in his apartment, uploaded a

video to YouTube describing his views on women and the modern world, emailed a personal memoir and manifesto to around ten people, drove to a sorority house and shot three people. He then drove to a deli and shot a diner, and then led police on a chase through Isla Vista California shooting and hitting passerby, before taking his own life by gunshot in his parked BMW. Like many horrific and seemingly random acts of violence in the 21st century, the media has heavily dissected and debated the significance of the event and its causation. Anti-gun political commentators discussed lax gun laws as the root of the issue¹¹⁶, feminists labeled misogyny the basis of Rodger's motivations¹¹⁷, leftists alleged that Rodger carried right wing views, and even some conservatives located leftism at the root of Rodger's misanthropy.¹¹⁸

One particularly crass explanation is the “Killer Virgin” narrative put forward by the New York Post. On most of if not all coverage of the shooting on the New York Post's website, Rodger is referred to as “Killer Virgin Elliot Rodger” or simply “Killer Virgin”, the implication being that Rodger's sexual frustration was the true cause for his crimes.¹¹⁹ This trope appeared in media coverage of mass shootings in the United States, complete with implications that repressed libidinal urges somehow exploded from these young men as a burst of violence. Rodger's difficulty to form relationships with women is not the root cause of his ideology or his attacks. If we collapse the distinction between a mass shooting and a domestic terrorist attack (for this, we need only collapse the distinction between the personal and political sphere), we can then apply our communicative theory of terrorism to the Rodger case and show that discourse and communication lie at the heart of the matter. Simply put, while misogyny and Rodger's mental illness were both important factors in his attacks, these issues were what he sought to

¹¹⁶ Patrick Frye, "Elliot Rodger: Gun Control Laws Already Linked to The Santa Barbara Shooting Suspect." *The Inquisitor News*. May 24, 2014.

¹¹⁷ Amanda Hess, "'If I Can't Have Them, No One Will': How Misogyny Kills Men." *Slate Magazine*. May/June, 2014.

¹¹⁸ Joshua Riddle, "Three Lies about 'right-wing Lunatic Virgin' Elliot Rodger That Liberals Wants You to Believe" *Young Conservatives*. 2014.

¹¹⁹ Associated Press, "Killer Virgin Researched Ways to Kill Silently before Rampage." *New York Post*. February 19, 2015.

communicate via an act of violence. Much like Breivik's attacks and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Rodger's acts can be construed as communicative within a global field of ideas and symbols.

Rodger prepared to conduct his attack by purchasing handguns, training himself in their use, and ruminating on which potential targets carried the most symbolic value.¹²⁰ Much like other domestic terrorists and mass shooters, his actual attack fell short of its projected goals, and in the end involved as much improvisation as adherence to a plan. In comparison with Breivik's 2011 attacks, we can perceive a much greater degree of noise in Rodger's broadcast and a diminished degree of preparation. This can in some ways be attributed to the age difference between the two young men, as well as the fact that Breivik prepared for a longer period.

As opposed to attacks that involve bombings or assaults on public or governmental structures, Rodger's operation required only the two handguns in his possession and a motor vehicle. The plan involved stabbing his housemates and their friend to death, an attack on a specific sorority which Rodger deemed had "the hottest girls" as members, and ended with Rodger's suicide via both drug overdose and a self-inflicted gunshot.¹²¹ Rodger was successful in killing the 3 men in his apartment, but unsuccessful in entering the sorority house, which derailed his plan and narrative. What we can observe from Rodger's failure to "shoot up" the sorority is that when his plan failed, the event devolved into wanton violence. Rodger does not appear to have had a contingency plan, which slightly neutered the symbolic reverberations of the attack in its mass media coverage. Rodger's attack did not quite hit all the signifiers he planned for, which equates to his attack being a less successful discursive act than the Columbine shootings or the 9/11 attacks, for example. This effect, in combination with the less sophisticated and composed nature of Rodger's manifesto, necessitates that scholars looking for historical or cultural

¹²⁰ Elliot Rodger, *My Twisted World*, Open Source Document, page 132.

¹²¹ Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, "Isla Vista Shooting Investigative Summary" <http://www.sbsheriff.us/documents/ISLAVISTAINVESTIGATIVESUMMARY.pdf>

significance regarding Rodger's attacks look a bit deeper beneath the surface.

In the wake of the shooting, media reports stated that Rodger's friends and family had been increasingly concerned about his behavior and statements, to the point where his mother asked Isla Vista police to conduct a “wellness check” on him at home in the weeks leading up to the shootings.¹²² Rodger himself discussed in his manifesto a period of testing the waters with his friends and family and their generally negative responses to the feelings he expressed.¹²³ This is consistent with Rodger's account of his efforts to share some of his other interests and viewpoints with the people close to him, as well as his apparent inability to communicate his emotions or experiences to his friends and family.

At this point it is important to note that Elliot Rodger, per his father's attorney, had been diagnosed with a high functioning case of Asperger's syndrome as a child, though the attorney walked back this statement a day later.¹²⁴ The Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department also reported that Rodger had been diagnosed with “Pervasive Development Disorder”, and that he had been treated with Prozac and alprazolam since his mid-teens for his social difficulties¹²⁵. Discussing the violent rhetoric of an individual diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome and attributing it to “discursive failures” is certainly dangerous ground, so the following clarification is necessary. Persons with mental illnesses or other related difficulties are in no way more likely to commit acts of violence, nor is the mass shooting a logical outcome of Asperger's syndrome any more than it is a logical outcome of sexual frustration. Both narratives individualize cultural problems with historical contexts, and project violence and social transgression onto individuals. By centering the discussion of Rodger on the “Killer Virgin” narrative or focusing on his Asperger's diagnosis, mass media coverage projects the causation of his attacks onto the ways he is different from the norm, as opposed to the structural and cultural forces that could produce

¹²² “Elliot Rodger 'welfare check' Detailed by Sheriff's Department” *Santa Maria Times*. May 2014.

¹²³ Rodger, 127.

¹²⁴ Joe Mozingo, “Frantic Parents of Shooting Suspect Raced to Isla Vista During Rampage.” *Los Angeles Times*. May 2014.

¹²⁵ Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department “Isla Vista Shooting Investigative Summary”

such an outcome. While the writings and actions of Elliot Rodger do in fact suggest some degree of mental illness, there is a difference between “mental illness” and “madness”, and the distinction in Rodger’s case is just as vital as it is in Breivik’s.

Michel Foucault located the evolving definition of madness within the development of “reason” as an organizing principle of modern societies.¹²⁶ The relationship between madness and communication is an important fulcrum of Foucault’s argument, in which he claims that the “madman” and the “lunatic” were confined not only physically but also cordoned off from the discourses of their societies, a pattern that continues into the modern world. Considering Breivik and Rodger, we can see an effort in the media to cordon off their ideas, one which ultimately has the opposite effect of disseminating the precise ideological content of their attacks to larger and larger audiences. Not only that, we see that boiling down the attacks to mental illness is a fatal error because both men produced media materials which are entirely intelligible within modern Western discourses, and to that affect, their attacks themselves are highly intelligible.

Elliot Rodger was born in 1991 to Peter Rodger, a filmmaker, and Li-Chin Rodger, a research assistant in the film industry, and much like Breivik was born in London before moving away at a young age. He lived with his parents in London until he was 5, at which point the family moved to California so his parents could pursue their film careers.¹²⁷ Rodger’s parents divorced before he turned 10, and while his mother remained single, his father remarried and fathered a child with his second wife.¹²⁸ Rodger described tension with his father’s new wife in his memoirs, and noted that he was unable to emulate his father’s success with women, and that his father’s inability to empathize with his personal challenges caused a rift between the two of them. Rodger’s relationship with his mother was similarly

¹²⁶ Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*. Translated by Jean Khalifa (NY: Routledge;2009) Preface to the 1961 edition. Pages xxvii–xxxix.

¹²⁷ Rodger, 2.

¹²⁸ Rodger, 8.

troubled, mostly stemming from a perceived failure on her part to achieve a certain level of material success, a major focus for Rodger and large component of his self-concept.

Regarding psychiatric treatments, Rodger had been treated by various mental health professionals from when he was 8 years old, ranging from psychiatrists to peer counselors. The issues for which he was treated included depression, issues forming relationships with women, social isolation, and low self-esteem. At one point, he was prescribed the antipsychotic drug Risperidone, but largely refused to take it¹²⁹. He also reportedly rejected most of the psychiatric counseling he was offered and declined to take the advice and counsel of his friends and family. We will move to his own personal rhetoric concerning his psychiatric treatments in the following pages, but suffice it to say for now that Rodger did not accept that a change of perspective could significantly change the outcomes in his personal life. After graduating high school, he attended two different community colleges in Southern California, living with either his mother or father depending on the status of his relationship with either parent. In June of 2011, Rodger moved to Santa Barbara to attend Santa Barbara City College.¹³⁰ Not only was this a change of scenery academically, he was also living on his own with housemates for the first time.

As troubled as his family relationships were, the move to Santa Barbara was clearly a major negative turning point in Rodger's personal trajectory. As he wrote in his memoirs, it was his move to Santa Barbara which brought him to the conclusion that his “Day of Retribution” was a necessary and inevitable outcome to his life.¹³¹ This raises the question, what about his experience in Santa Barbara was so negative, and what events pushed him to feel that he could only articulate himself to the world via violence? To contend with this question, we should locate Rodger within a series of historical

129 “Elliot Rodger's Family Tried to Intervene at Time of Rampage.” *CBS News*. May, 26, 2014.

¹³⁰ Rodger, 83.

¹³¹ Rodger, 101.

continuities.

First, we place Rodger within the histories of “geek” culture and the “alternative right”. On the corners of the internet where Rodger was commonly found, there is a documented prevalence and emphasis on political ideas which are purported to be “fringe” and “revolutionary”¹³². Eugenics, a rejection of racial and gender egalitarianism, a rejection of democracy, homophobia, anti-semitism, and other taboo opinions are openly expressed and promoted.¹³³ The curious thing about today’s “neoreactionary” ideology is that it so perfectly inverts mainstream political discourse in the United States.¹³⁴ For example, it is a mainstream opinion in American discourse today that race is a social construct and that no basic differences exist between a white and black person on a biological basis. In the alternative right movement, however, racial differences in IQ for example exist along biological lines and can be explained via anthropology.¹³⁵ The reason that alternative right ideas are so readily intelligible and resonant, such as those tacitly embraced by PayPal founder Peter Thiel and to some extent 2016 presidential candidate Donald Trump, is that they perfectly invert mainstream opinions and thus follow the same grammar and internal logic. Thus, the incendiary rhetoric of a Vox Day or a Milo Yiannopoulos does not stand on its own as an outside critique or attack on mainstream American ideas. In fact, it forms only one half of a cohesive and mutually complementary system. It is within this field of ideas that Rodger developed his ideology, which has been reflected within his huge popularity in its circles after his attack and death.

Numerous factors can be identified in the evolution of what we now call the “alternative right”. The most obvious factor is the proliferation of the internet, which is not only almost entirely deregulated

¹³² Oscar Flores, "Isla Vista Shooter Details Revealed in Report." *KEYT News*. February 9, 2015.

¹³³ Corey Pein, "Mouthbreathing Machiavellis Dream of a Silicon Reich - The Baffler." *The Baffler*. May 19, 2014.

¹³⁴ Michelle Goldberg, "How the “Hipster Nazi” Alt Right Got Big Enough for Hillary Clinton to Denounce It." *Slate Magazine*. 2016.

¹³⁵ Allum Bokhari, and Milo Yiannopoulos, "An Establishment Conservative's Guide To The Alt-Right." *Breitbart News*. March 29, 2016.

but also facilitates wide scale communication instantaneously beyond national borders. Internet users also have the option to communicate anonymously, which creates spaces where inflammatory or controversial opinions can be discussed freely.¹³⁶ Most importantly, ideas are circulated without being beholden to the whims of mass media conglomerates or the state. For many historians and media commentators, the first example of the internet's role in political discourse was in 1998 when Bill Clinton's affair scandal first broke on "The Drudge Report", a website on which California journalist Matt Drudge posted controversial and little known news reports.¹³⁷ There is a wide and rich literature about misogyny on the internet, and the extent to which women find themselves unsafe online. In *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender, and Power on the Internet*, journalist Laurie Penny considers misogyny online from an autobiographical perspective, and most crucially explains how a certain "no rules" anti-authoritarian culture in internet communities has created an atmosphere where "offensive" ideas and images can circulate.¹³⁸ However, the most transgressive and shocking internet posts are still within mainstream discourse in that they are intelligible within it.

This was the first example of a strain of right wing media activities existing online outside the realm of censors or organized political groups, and the trend continued when Andrew Breitbart founded his own eponymous website, famed for its expose of ACORN, ending the career of USDA official Shirley Sherrod, and other media activities. Breitbart himself had studied the mass media theories of the Frankfurt School during his years at Tulane University, which suggests that his understanding of mass media was ironically influenced by Marxist thinkers. The late Breitbart's website is now "the platform for the alt right", and was one of the largest sources of media support for Donald Trump's campaign.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Josephine Armistead, *The Silicon Ideology*. Open Source Document. pp 11.

¹³⁷ RM. O'Neil, "The drudge case: A look at issues in cyberspace defamation." *Washington Law Review* 73, no 3 (1998): 623-36.

¹³⁸ Laurie Penny, *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender, and Power on the Internet*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p. 24.

¹³⁹ Chava Gourarie, "How the 'alt-right' Checkmated the Media," *Columbia Journalism Review*. August 30, 2016.

There is a long-standing relationship between internet discourse and right wing politics in the United States, which accounts for the widely divergent and extensively trafficked array of websites which Rodger used to construct his own views on race, gender, and politics. The report by the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department details that when they looked at Rodger's laptop, they found that he had made multiple searches pertaining to not only knives and violence, but also numerous topics related to Nazism and Adolf Hitler.¹⁴⁰ The search of the laptop also showed that Rodger had accessed PUAHate.com and a bodybuilding website. The media also reported on his online footprint in the wake of the attacks, noting that his internet activities were in many cases highly disturbing and objectionable.¹⁴¹ Historically, we can ground Elliot Rodger's attacks within a larger contemporary historical trend of objectionable, shocking", and vulgar developments in 21st century America.

Rodger participated in online discussions about sexual relationships, often commenting that he felt jealous when he saw men of Asian or African-American background with white women, and felt himself more deserving of their attention.¹⁴² This echoes the passage in his manifesto where he describes being angered by a black acquaintance's story of losing his virginity. Rodger himself noted that he was "half-white and descended from British aristocracy" while the other young man is "the descendant of slaves"¹⁴³. There are numerous instances in which Rodger finds himself quarreling with other young men who he deems "low class", "brutes", and typically inferior to him on a basis of race or social class¹⁴⁴. This can be compared with Breivik's manifesto, in which he identifies the Muslim youths of Oslo with a powerful virility and masculinity, and "the Norwegian male" as feminized and weak. Miscegenation has a long history in American identity politics, and has long been a chief concern of the "paleoconservatives" who

¹⁴⁰ Bill Brown, *Isla Vista Shooting Investigative Summary*. Police Report, Santa Barbara, California: Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department 2011. 38-41,

¹⁴¹ Kashmir Hill, "The Disturbing Internet Footprint of Santa Barbara Shooter Elliot Rodger," *Forbes*. May 24, 2014.

¹⁴² Kashmir Hill, "The Disturbing Internet Footprint of Santa Barbara Shooter Elliot Rodger," *Forbes*. May 24, 2014.

¹⁴³ Rodger, 84.

¹⁴⁴ Rodger, 90.

are often credited as the forefathers of today's alternative right movement. The late Samuel T. Francis wrote extensively on right wing website VDARE about miscegenation and its supposed evils, and many of his 1980s and 1990s writings on race can be seen reflected in today's discourse¹⁴⁵. Rodger existed within a fully developed political movement, one which to some extent has its mouthpiece in a major American presidential candidate.¹⁴⁶

Elliot Rodger's media consumption also informed his life and ideas. On page 61 of his manifesto, Rodger wrote that he was deeply affected by the film *Alpha Dog*, and notes that he was envious of one of the main characters, despite the character being murdered in the end of the film.¹⁴⁷ For a brief overview, the plot of the film centers on the real-life kidnapping and murder of Nicholas Markowitz in 2000. Markowitz was abducted and killed in a complex scenario involving a drug debt, and the film revolves around images of masculinity, power, and violence. What Rodger was struck most by was the part of the movie where Markowitz's abductors are depicted taking him to a series of raucous parties in the Los Angeles area in which he drinks, uses drugs, and has sex with women. Rodger writes that he was deeply moved by this imagery, and began to associate Santa Barbara with it. In fact, it was his experience with the film and the association he formed between Santa Barbara and the "life of pleasure and sex" that he aspired to. Thus, he made the decision to pursue a move to Santa Barbara and attend school there.¹⁴⁸

What we can glean from this is that Rodger marked Santa Barbara as a symbol of success with women and social belonging, and presumed that a move there to attend school would be the catalyst for a positive change in his life. We will consider Rodger's ruminations in his manifesto considering John Thompson's theories in *Media and Modernity*. Per Thompson, the modern subject lives in a society

¹⁴⁵Jared Taylor, "Jared Taylor's Introduction To Sam Francis' Essential Writings on Race." *VDARE*. January 21, 2008.

¹⁴⁶ Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "Is the Alt-Right for Real?" *The New Yorker*, May 05, 2016.

¹⁴⁷ Rodger, 61.

¹⁴⁸ Rodger, 77.

in which the forces determining their existence are far beyond their concrete comprehension, experience, or control. In this setting, individuals primarily experience their society via mass media, and cross reference its concepts and images with their own personal experience. People find media that aligns with their experience, media which directly contradicts it, and in some cases media which allows them to reinterpret their experiences. In the case of Elliot Rodger, in at least one case he internalized images and concepts which did not correlate to his reality, and found the dissonance between the two deeply painful. Rodger does not explicitly state this in his manifesto, but a causation can be pieced together by considering his expectations of life in Santa Barbara, his experiences there, and the choices he made thus.

Another important note about *Alpha Dog* is that one of its major thematic elements is appropriation of “gangsta” mannerisms and style by presumably middle class white teenagers, and their use of the signifiers of blackness to bolster their personal senses of masculinity. While Rodger does not directly speak to this on page 61, issues of race, masculinity, and sexuality are demonstrably strong themes in his manifesto and online activities. *Alpha Dog* depicts a particularly curious Southern California in which various cultural identities are continuously renegotiated and exist in a state of becoming. Not only do many of the white characters embody and perform stereotypically “black” style, one of the film’s prime antagonists is a neo-Nazi skinhead who is also ostensibly Jewish. A sex scene with the character and his girlfriend reveal Nazi flags and paraphernalia in his room, but in another scene, he is referred to as a “kike” during a fight. This is explained at no point during the film, but the person depicted in the film, Ben Markowitz, was indeed Jewish.

In any case, it is easy to see how Rodger would appreciate a film in which racial and gender identities in a Southern California much like his own are hybridized and reordered. Looking at films of the 1990s which depict Los Angeles and its suburbs, we can observe consistent themes of racial tension,

but also violent white masculinity. In both “Alpha Dog” and “American History X”, white supremacist skinheads are shown having aggressive sex with women in the foreground of Nazi symbols, and in the case of “American History X,” Edward Norton’s character brutally kills a black gang member for attempting to steal his car moments afterward. Southern California is one of America’s most diverse regions, and “angry white man” sentiments in the city have occurred in numerous films, most notably “Falling Down” starring Michael Douglas in which the lead character responds to being laid off from his job as an engineer with a killing spree across a multiracial and violent Los Angeles, a narrative which many film critics have boiled down to a violent response to a decentered white masculinity. “Falling Down” overlaps with Martin Scorsese’s “Taxi Driver”, another film about white men fighting back against a newly deterritorialized urban space. Rodger’s California compared with Breivik’s Oslo, shares an intersection of symbols regarding race, masculinity, sexuality, and the imagined “Other”. It is important to note that Rodger himself may not have seen “Falling Down” or “American History X”, but if we allow that images and concepts reverberate and recreate themselves within the field of mass media, we can see that images of Los Angeles in the media during Rodger’s upbringing reflected conflicts of race, identity, and reterritorialization. Recalling Thompson, we conclude that Rodger’s own experience growing up in Southern California was fundamentally conversant with the media’s depiction of his own environment. In short, scenes and symbols of white masculinity asserting itself through violence is a theme foreign to neither of these young men, and their manifestos and acts can be taken as efforts on their part to add their own spin to the same basic story.

On the lighter side of cinema, the wake of the Isla Vista shootings saw a debate in the media about the comedy films of Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen and their role in Rodger's motivations. Feminist film critic Ann Hornaday argued that the narratives of Apatow and Rogen's movies fed into the cultural issues around male sexual entitlement which constituted part of Rodger's worldview, and Rogen fired

back that it was preposterous for her to imply that the content of his films “caused a lunatic to go on a shooting spree.”¹⁴⁹ This was an unfortunate choice on Rogen's part, to pathologize Rodger's attacks and again portray him as an isolated mentally ill person as opposed to an individual whose experience of the world is fundamentally informed by mass media. The crux of Hornaday's argument was that Rogen's films typically revolve around a “nerd” or non-conventionally desirable male who through some feat ends up in a relationship with a “hot blonde” or some other such stereotype of ideal feminine beauty¹⁵⁰.

While it may appear that this is a progressive narrative, in that it shows a man does not have to embody the social ideal of masculinity to form successful relationships with women, feminist critics have pointed out that the definition of a successful relationship put forward is the attainment of a woman who embodies the idealized feminine. In these movies, men can surmount their difficulties as a marginalized man, but the object of their affection is always an idealized woman. Not only that, the narrative is as much a vision of universal sexual entitlement for men as it is anything else. Rodger certainly perceived himself as a marginalized man, stating in online comments and his personal writings that he felt women lacked interest in him due to his Asian heritage on his mother's side. From Hornaday's perspective, the idea that he could achieve success with “hot blondes” despite his marginalized status could be damaging to Rodger's troubled mind if his experience failed to mirror it. In this way, we can see how the messages in Apatow's films could contribute to this problem in this specific case, in that Rodger received a utopian vision of sexual fulfillment which did not mirror his reality. This would of course be another case of dissonance between media consumed and lived experience, and contribute to Rodger's feelings of dejection and isolation. In any case, once we accept that a dissonance between media and experience translates to a feeling of isolation from society, Hornaday's argument appears more cogent and Rogen's argument begins to fall flat. If society exists in

¹⁴⁹ Andrew O'Hehir, “How Seth Rogen Proved Ann Hornaday's Point about Elliot Rodger.” *Salon*. May 27, 2014.

¹⁵⁰ O'Hehir,.

the abstract beyond concrete observation, it stands to reason that modern societies are continuously recreated through their media if not by it. Accepting Thompson's argument, we can locate Rodger's radicalization in the dialog between the media he consumed and his lived experience.

The world that Rodger perceived via his media consumption was idealized and had very little to do with the life experience of most people. In fact, films like “Alpha Dog” are generally pointed to by cultural theorists as examples of a certain escapism, i.e. an intentionally unrealistic image and narrative which is different from the average person's life by design. Unfortunately, Rodger seems to have lacked the perspective to work this out for himself. We can hardly fault him for failing to note that his lived experience was fundamentally contoured by mass media, as this is the lot of all modern subjects, but we can and should observe the extent to which his media consumption combined with his experience to produce such a tragic outcome.

One event appears to be a major focal point in Rodger's trajectory towards the “Day of Retribution”. In his manifesto, Rodger describes an incident in which he was at a party and came across some “loud and obnoxious boys”, and became enraged at his perception that women were attracted to obnoxious and hypermasculine men instead of him.¹⁵¹ Possibly due to his state of intoxication, he attempted to push some of the young men and women off a ledge, and in the ensuing fight was pushed from the ledge himself, breaking his leg. After the fact, he also noticed that his designer sunglasses and an expensive gold chain had been stolen.¹⁵² This account is confirmed by the Santa Barbara Sherriff’s Department, on page 45 of their report.¹⁵³ The feelings of humiliation after this incident, combined with the fact that neither of his parents were willing to allow him to stay with them in its wake, appears to be the next point of departure in Rodger's development from troubled young man to mass killer. Not only

¹⁵¹ Rodger, 122.

¹⁵² Mariah Blake, “Read the Police Report from the Incident that Convinced Elliot Rodger to Go on His Shooting Spree,” *Mother Jones*, June 11 2014.

¹⁵³ Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Department

was he unable to achieve his goal of physical violence against the “boisterous boys” he hated, but he was unable to articulate to those closest to him his reasons for attempting it, nor would his family care for him as he physically recovered. Rodger wrote in his manifesto that he had gone out that night with the intent of meeting women and socializing, and that he had viewed it as “his last chance”, not to prove himself, but for humanity to prove its value to him by accepting him, and ultimately loving him.¹⁵⁴

Rodger was unable to realize this goal that night, and in fact was convinced more than ever of the necessity of his “Day of Retribution”. The experience of physical violence and the perceived inability to communicate this experience to the people close to him can be read as a fundamental point of departure regarding Rodger’s ability to “speak”. As Rodger explicitly states in his manifesto, it is at this point that he “gave up” on his relationships with other people. Rodger also noted that his possessions were in the hands of “evil, wretched, thugs”, who would use them to “buy drugs.”¹⁵⁵ We cannot say for certain, but given Rodger’s other media interests and the origins of many ideas it is safe to assume that this is racially coded language. Much like Breivik, Rodger struggled with a conception of masculinity which was centered outside of whiteness. Not only that, his Chinese heritage on his mother’s side pushed him even further from the ideal of masculinity and beauty he aspired to.

If it seems strange that Rodger would stake so much on the media as his means of understanding the world, perhaps we should again center his troubled family relationships and point out that he had difficulty meaningfully interacting with those closest to him. It is presumed that a normal well-adjusted person exists in conversation with the people around them, and that these relationships are much more meaningful and helpful to their understanding of their experience than the media they consume. For a person who struggles to communicate with friends and family, however, mass media will play a much more prominent role in the formation of their identity. Rodger's writing on his self-concept and his

¹⁵⁴ Rodger, 124.

¹⁵⁵ Rodger, 122.

experiences may seem very extreme and vivid to the reader, but since teen movies were much more foundational to his self-concept than his interpersonal relationships, it is more easily understood.

Rodger is certainly not the only young heterosexual man to perceive that his relationships with women do not measure up to the idealized standard put forward in mass media, and in fact there is an entire industry devoted to solving this problem and helping these young men interact with women “successfully”, scare quotes intended. Dating back to the 1970s, the “seduction community” is a collection of organizations and writers which seek to teach men conversation techniques and basic psychology to become more successful with women.¹⁵⁶ Feminists have criticized the movement and its proponents in detail, making the point that it boils down women's agency to “biological” drives and “evolutionary” processes, and that centering sexual success with women around concepts of involuntary responses to male actions falls under the auspice of rape culture.¹⁵⁷ One especially strong critique of the “pick up artist” idea is the notion that “biological” reasoning as applied to humans is “always already” colored by cultural presuppositions and the historical conditioning of the scholar in question.

Much like Maslow's ideas were filtered through Charles Darwin's thought and then applied to human societies under the auspice of “Social Darwinism”, the biological basis of the seduction community's program is cultural ideas about men and women filtered through pseudoscience. Rodger himself spent a good amount of time perusing the “seduction community” and its ideas, ultimately finding that its techniques were unsuccessful in his own life, and that its ideas were false. There is a link between a supposed biological approach to seduction and the “economization” of sexuality under neoliberal policies. The notion that scientific reasoning can be applied unilaterally to human reality is not local to fringe ideas, and in fact can be observed in wide ranging aspects of government policy.

¹⁵⁶ R. Almog and D. Kaplan, “The nerd and his discontent: The seduction community and the logic of the game as a geeky solution to the challenges of young masculinity.” *Men and Masculinities*. November 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Amanda Denes, “Biology as consent: Problematizing the scientific approach to seducing women's bodies,” *Women's Studies International Forum*, 34-5. September-October 2011. pp 411-419.

Scientific reasoning is often combined with economic rationalism to boil down more and more aspects of human affairs to market forces¹⁵⁸.

This moves us to the next phase in Rodger's development as a thinker, and takes us to an even darker corner of popular culture. The “seduction community” has been characterized by feminists as positing women in a “state of nature”, and implying that they can be manipulated and enticed by techniques from basic psychology. Many men who have not experienced success with these techniques and ideas, however have formed their own movement, an “anti-pick up artist” community. Sadly, these opponents of the seduction community do not embrace feminism or the idea that human relationships cannot be understood in terms of biology or evolutionary psychology. On the contrary, they embrace a much deeper and more vicious hate of the feminine, and locate their failure to form relationships with women within a deep pathology in women themselves. This is the Elliot Rodger we find at the end of the manifesto, one who concludes that women should be kept in concentration camps and used only to breed more people, and that a world without women and sexuality would be his vision of utopia. Rodger was a participant on “PUAHate.com”, and in his manifesto, wrote that he attempted to share the viewpoints he read on the website with his friends and family, only to be met with derision or disinterest¹⁵⁹.

A given society's media will generally reproduce its economic and political realities in its narratives and imagery, and in conversation with this concept we can read Rodger as attempting to enter the idealized image world of his consumed media via the self-improvement techniques he absorbed online. At this point we can make a comparison with Anders Breivik, who was himself an avid bodybuilder, underwent plastic surgery, and even utilized international dating services in his pursuit for a

¹⁵⁸ William Wilkerson, “Neoliberalism, biodiscipline, and cultural critique”. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (2010): 64-73.

¹⁵⁹ Rodger, 118.

successful relationship with a woman. Unfortunately, when Rodger ultimately rejected these principles as they applied to his own life, and rejected the narratives in mass media which contoured his desires for human connection and belonging, he saw himself left only with apocalyptic violence. Rather than imagining a different world or a different perspective, destroying humanity and the feminine itself was the only model he perceived for solving the basic problem of his struggle to form relationships with other people.

In a tragic turn, Rodger's repeated efforts to communicate and form relationships with other people, women especially, turned him against other people and convinced him of their inadequacies rather than demonstrating to him a need to improve himself or approach these situations from a different perspective. In the end, his location of these difficulties in other people led him to reject the value of humanity itself, especially the value of women's lives, and he concluded that an act of mass violence was the only way to assert himself as the “true alpha male”.

CHAPTER 4: ELLIOT RODGER'S INTELLIGIBILITY

In the case of Anders Breivik, his 2011 attacks were described both as far right terrorism and as the act of a mentally ill person. Not only that, his attacks were situated by the media within the spectrums of various social antagonisms, examples being gender, Islamophobia, European populist politics, and the question of immigration to Europe. In the case of Elliot Rodger, however, there were only two predominating themes in media coverage of his life and attacks, namely mental illness and misogyny. Misogyny is a wide concept with numerous different interpretations, but two specific stripes of misogyny have been identified by most American commentators. The question of Rodger's mental illness is similarly divergent, with scholars and commentators attributing his personal issues and violent actions to a series of different cognitive or personality disorders. Rodger's media coverage centered on these two issues, while that on Breivik dealt with a wider array of subjects, since Breivik's act was more

immediately communicative and touched on a wider array of symbols. With the same issues of communication, misogyny, and violence were present in both cases.

The first strain of misogyny presented by the American media about Elliot Rodger is the idea of an individual who possesses antipathy towards women, feelings of sexual and emotional entitlement, and violent urges toward women who fail to meet these entitlements.¹⁶⁰ The most important element of this narrative is that it locates the problem within the individual themselves, and describes a purportedly deviant or aberrant behavior¹⁶¹. In the cited article from *Alligator*, there is a reference to nice guy *syndrome*, a choice of words which implies pathology. A stronger variant is the presentation of these sentiments as far reaching cultural problems, as opposed to one individual's deviancy.¹⁶² In any case, Elliot Rodger's motivations and personal writings have been presented largely through either a personal or cultural lens, as opposed to a political or historical viewpoint. This raises the old debate of “personal vs. political” and in some ways obscures the clear historical implications of Rodger's writings and ideas. It is important to consider these subjects through multiple modes of thought and demonstrate how the structure of his manifesto, attacks, and mass media coverage demonstrate trends and issues in our current epoch. Rather than simply being mad or a “killer virgin”, it is much more productive consider Rodger and his attacks as informed by and conversant with today’s political landscape. Following that point, we must also consider his shootings to be communicative acts intelligible within today’s social paradigm. Not only that, we can see within Rodger’s manifesto the extent to which he clearly articulates points relevant to today’s debates in the field of gender politics.

On page 57 of his manifesto, Rodger wrote that at 17 he dedicated much of his personal time to

¹⁶⁰ Brian Levinson, "I Could Have Been Elliot Rodger." *Slate Magazine*. 2014.

¹⁶¹ Robyn Smith, "'Nice Guy' Syndrome Gone Deadly: Examining the UCSB Shooting," *The Independent Florida Alligator*, May 27, 2014.

¹⁶² Maya Francis, "Elliot Rodger, Misguided Male Entitlement, and the “Nice Guy” Fallacy,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, May 29, 2014.

studying history, politics, and sociology, and forming his own ideology which would correct the problems he observed around him.¹⁶³ The political agenda Rodger laid out in the end of his manifesto is unrefined, and positions gender and sexuality as the basic defining characteristic of human societies.¹⁶⁴ While his views were not articulated in “political language” and did not consist of actual policy positions, he did outline the essential structure of his ideal society. It also demonstrated a curiously materialist and essentialist view of human gender, and its emphasis on gender segregation and separatism show a curious similarity to other political paradigms based on principles of separation and difference¹⁶⁵. Again, if we dissolve the distinction between personal and political views Rodger's entire manifesto can be read as a political memoir not unlike Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and the groups and individuals associated with his ideas can be viewed as a political coalition of sorts. Strangely enough, Anders Breivik’s manifesto contained similar sentiments on segregation and sexuality, and suggested that human sexuality should be controlled and regulated via governing institutions.¹⁶⁶

On DailyKos.com, blogger “OllieGarkey” wrote that Elliot Rodger was influenced by the “men's rights movement.” Men's rights advocates, or MRAs in shorthand, are individuals and organizations, mostly in the English-speaking world who feel that culture and government policy discriminates against men. Common grievances include child support and alimony laws, obligations for adult males to register for the draft, disparities in domestic violence prosecution, and declining male incomes relative to women in some demographics. “OllieGarkey”, while acknowledging the role of “MRA” ideas in influencing Rodger's personal views, ultimately finds the causality for the attack in Rodger's documented mental illness.¹⁶⁷ “OllieGarkey” also makes the point that Rodger refused most of the psychiatric help he was

¹⁶³ Rodger, 57.

¹⁶⁴ Rodger, 136.

¹⁶⁵ Rodger, 136.

¹⁶⁶ Breivik, 1168.

¹⁶⁷ Ollie Garkey, "Elliot Rodger, Gunman in California Mass Shooting, Was Influenced by the "Men's Rights Movement"" *Daily Kos*. May 24, 2014.

offered by his family, and chose instead to delve deeper into the “manosphere,” the corners of the internet where “MRAs” congregate and share their ideas.¹⁶⁸ While it seems noncontroversial that Rodger was mentally ill, we return to Foucault’s insights on madness. If we view “OllieGarkey”’s article through this lens, it appears that he implies Rodger rejected the opportunity to normalize his thinking and return to the mainstream discourse, and that his embrace of MRA ideology is a function of his mental illness. We can compare this with the efforts of the international press to expound on Anders Breivik’s supposed “paranoid schizophrenia” as opposed to discussing far right populist currents in European politics. In both cases, it is evident that official diagnoses or consensus were very sparingly reached, and that there is a larger question behind the debate on the shooter’s mental health.

“OllieGarkey”’s piece quoted above was itself a rebuttal to criticisms of his earlier association of Elliot Rodger with the MRA movement in response to Rodger’s attacks. While the author does not describe Rodger himself as a political agent or domestic terrorist, he does link his personal views with those expressed on MRA websites. Rather than describing MRAs as political actors or purveyors of a political agenda, he sticks with the predominant interpretation of their ideas within their media coverage, namely one of personal deviance or transgression, albeit in a collective expression. This larger trend of relegating fringe political ideas to personal “hate” or the projection of personal failure onto imagined social oppression, while well intentioned, obscures the reality that these ideas and movements have political implications.

With respect to the MRA movement, the consensus in most media coverage is that it is best described as an organic backlash to feminism and greater gender equality in modern societies. This is reasonable enough, but scholars have increasingly denounced it as reductive and guilty of reproducing the narrative of MRAs themselves. Ana Jordan writes that MRA rhetoric in the United Kingdom, for

¹⁶⁸ Ollie Garkey,..

example. is largely founded upon a process of coopting feminist rhetoric and theories but applying them to men.¹⁶⁹ We can compare this with Breivik's focus on the human rights of so called indigenous Europeans facing a genocide at the hands of Muslim settlers. This is the face of the 21st century right, an effort to coopt feminist, antiracist, anticolonial, and other struggles and theories in the service of white male identity politics. What this implies is that men who embrace MRA ideas may in fact find themselves marginalized and disadvantaged, but attribute their troubles to gendered oppression as men rather than other forces. For example, in much of the United States, manufacturing jobs have been outsourced to the developing world. These jobs have historically been dominated by men, and as result men in these places may find themselves marginalized across what appear to be gendered lines, as traditionally "feminine" job markets like customer service and health care remain resilient. This is a highly complex and nuanced perspective, a far cry from the reductive notion of "backlash". It is also telling that the conflation of one form of marginalization for another can also be applied as a theory to modern white nationalist movements, sovereign citizens' groups, and the unforeseen success of US presidential elect Donald J. Trump in the 2016 election cycle. For another comparison with the 2011 Norway attacks, we can see the increased economic instability brought on by Kare Willoch's 1980s policies and the ensuing cultural resentment amongst Progress Party members.

In the realm of the cultural, we return to the subject of free market logic and its applications to other areas of human experience. Rodger and Breivik were famous enemies of feminism, but the term took on meaning in ways at different points in their writing. Beyond that, feminism is hardly a static concept or set of ideas and has a historical trajectory all its own. Regarding American feminism, we look to Nancy Fraser's explanation of its development. Fraser asserts that feminism in the United States

¹⁶⁹ Ana Jordan, "Conceptualizing Backlash: (UK) Men's Rights Groups, Anti-Feminism, and Postfeminism," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28.1 (2016): 18-44.

focused on issues of political economy and structural inequality for the first few decades of its existence, either aligning itself with collectivist economic thought or critiquing it from a gendered perspective.¹⁷⁰ For Fraser, the event which changed this emphasis in feminist thought was the fall of communism and the sudden resurgence of neoliberal economic thinking, in tandem with globalization.¹⁷¹

The new focus of feminism was cultural politics and issues of androcentric cultural values, to use the author's words. In other words, the focus of feminist rhetoric and theory became focused on cultural issues, and divorced in many cases from material critiques¹⁷². This resulted in a feminism which was unable to contend with material and structural gender discrimination. Fraser makes a point to note that this was not a principled decision, but rather a response to a new historical context in which social democracy and its legacy were no longer a source of political legitimacy¹⁷³. The implication here is that feminist theory has in some ways adjusted itself to the assumption that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism and market-based forms of political economy. If there is a lesson to be learned at this point, it is that these assumptions have created a field of cultural struggle and discourse in which political economy and material questions are increasingly obfuscated. In Elliot Rodger's writing, the only times he mentioned economic questions were cases in which they were subordinated to gender or related to status and prestige, all cultural issues in his mind. If MRA discourse is indeed an inversion of feminism which coopts rhetoric of gender discrimination and victimization and applies it to men, it stands to reason that the feminism of Elliot Rodger's America is the "neoliberal cultural feminism" of Nancy Fraser, and his thinking on gender is its inversion. As discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural antagonisms present in both Rodger and Breivik's writings constitute mutually complementary

¹⁷⁰ Nancy Fraser, "Mapping the feminist imagination: from redistribution to recognition to representation." in *The Future of Gender* ed. Jude Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) ,17-32.

¹⁷¹ Fraser, 22.

¹⁷² Fraser, 22.

¹⁷³ Fraser, 22.

systems in which two opposites follow the same internal logic and perpetually inform each other. This is not to say that misogyny and feminism are locked into a cycle intrinsically, but rather that in mass media discourse the systems function together in such a manner.

In Rodger's writing, he states that sexuality is the root of the problems of modern society. In the final pages of his manifesto, he writes that women are the root of inequality between men, and that without the power to withhold or grant sexual fulfillment to men they would be unable to cause the "impurity" and "degeneracy" in today's world.¹⁷⁴ Any student of modern political history has seen the concepts of "impurity" and "degeneracy" used in political tracts, from the essays of Nazi eugenicists to Max Nordau's *Degeneration* where he describes the moral and social decay of modern European society. The location of societal problems within specific demographics or ideas is also a hallmark of far right politics throughout modern history, a familiar example being Nazi attribution of Germany's economic woes to the supposed machinations and treachery of Jewish Germans. For non-western examples, we can look to persecution of ethnic Chinese people across Indonesia's history and Idi Amin's persecution of Indian Ugandans during his tenure as the African nation's leader. Another important note on Rodger's thought is that his theory of gender politics is ahistorical, and suggests a power dynamic between men and women irrespective of historical or regional context. Rather than harkening to an idealized past and culture, as Breivik does, Rodger's thought presents itself as corrective of an error fundamental to humanity itself. In short, Rodger's manifesto presented itself as a progressive theory and a way forward for humanity, as opposed to a recovery of an ancient past. Most importantly, male sexual entitlement and fulfillment are the cornerstone of his ideology, and serve as the fulcrum of his diagnosis of modern problems.

In Rodger's vision of a utopian world, women are isolated from men and the majority are starved

¹⁷⁴ Rodger, 136.

to death in concentration camps.¹⁷⁵ The remaining female population is used solely for reproduction, and eugenic methods are used to “breed their depraved nature out of them.”¹⁷⁶ These are abhorrent and unrealistic ideas, but they do not exist in a vacuum. “MRAs” can often be found on the internet advocating for woman-free societies, and again Rodger is certainly not the originator of eugenics nor the first proponent of concentration camps. Another important component of his ideal world is the notion that his society is led by a single authoritarian leader, and that democracy and notions of “equality” are dispensed with.¹⁷⁷ This is another point at which we see striking similarities between not only Rodger and Anders Breivik, but also both mass shooters and broad swaths of far-right discourse online. Beyond that, there are clear similarities to many common tropes in right wing politics and fascist ideology throughout modern history. For example, media commentators have observed a trend in the upper echelons of the technology industry wherein “democracy” is rejected in favor of authoritarian political ideologies and “inegalitarian” views.¹⁷⁸ While Rodger and Breivik conceive of their political subjectivity differently on a surface level, Rodger's hate for the “sexually active alpha male” and Breivik's concerns over the “feminized native European man” and his inability to defend against an imagined Muslim invasion share clear similarities and symbolic preoccupations. In both cases, there is an imagined “Other” who enjoys some degree of sexual fulfillment and belonging, in contrast to the white male hero of both manifestos (the mass shooters themselves) who are shut out from this experience. While at first glance it would appear that Breivik's themes are both racial and gendered, whereas Rodger's thought was solely gender based, a closer reading shows that this is not the case. Rodger in some cases applies white nationalist logic to questions of gender, and favors gender segregation the same way Breivik favors mass deportations of Muslims from Europe.

¹⁷⁵ Rodger, 136.

¹⁷⁶ Rodger, 136.

¹⁷⁷ Rodger, 136.

¹⁷⁸ Corey Pein, "Mouthbreathing Machiavellis Dream of a Silicon Reich - The Baffler," *The Baffler*. May 19, 2014.

While gender was viewed by media commentators as the main fulcrum of Rodger's motivations, many of his writings both online and in his manifesto reveal opinions about race as well. A New York Daily News article quotes Rodger as voicing his frustration and disgust in seeing an interracial couple, stating he found it abhorrent that a young black man could attract a white girlfriend and he was not. Rodger's logic was founded on the notion that the black man was a “descendent of slaves”, while he himself was descended from “British aristocracy.”¹⁷⁹ Rodger is also quoted as saying he “deserved it more”. This discomfort with interracial dating and antipathy for black males can be read as personal hate and deviance, but can also be understood in terms of much larger cultural narratives about race and sexuality in American history. A connection to politics can be drawn in terms of “miscegenation” laws and ideas about “racial purity” which informed Jim Crow segregation policies. Viewed in terms of the right-wing ideologies and groups Rodger has been linked to, it is characteristic of a set of ideas concerned with authoritarian governments, antipathy for democracy, and a fundamental rejection of modernity and its values. This can be compared with the imagery of sexual violence in Breivik's depiction of “the Islamic conquest of Europe”. Once again, we can locate Rodger's rhetoric within the bounds of a perceived cultural antagonism.

Rodger also discussed his own ethnicity and commented on his Asian heritage, noting that being half Asian on his mother's side made him “inferior” to the white standard of masculinity he felt judged against. In his manifesto, he recounted an experience at a party in which he became enraged at the sight of a young man of Asian descent talking to a “beautiful white girl.”¹⁸⁰ For Rodger, this was especially unsettling as he had long felt that his partial Asian heritage was a factor in his lack of success with the women he was attracted to. A post on the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund website

¹⁷⁹ Michael Kimmel And Cliff Leek, "Racism Played a Role in Elliot Rodger's Murder Spree: Experts." *NY Daily News*. May 27, 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Rodger, 121.

quotes Rodger as noting in his manifesto that he had previously attempted to bleach his hair blonde because he felt that blonde people were “more beautiful.”¹⁸¹ Rodger's attempts to fit into an idealized blonde image of powerful masculinity certainly cannot be lost on any student of cultural images, and his tragic reading of his self-concept within the confines of a specific ideal of masculinity are consistent with National Socialist aesthetics of the ideal “Aryan” male. These images also make regular appearance in Breivik's writing, and have been interpreted as informing Breivik's choices to pursue intensive weight training and plastic surgery to “improve” his facial structure. In both manifestos, the authors posit an ideal of masculinity that they themselves are marginalized from, and this is put forward as the root of their personal troubles or the social issues they perceive.

It is also important to consider what media images and narratives Rodger evaluated his experience against, and what led to his feelings of sexual entitlement and rejection. While Rodger's evidence and accounts of his difficult life are based in his personal experience, applying John Thompson's theory from *The Media and Modernity* reveals a causal link between Rodger's historical setting and his personal experiences. Thompson writes that the modern subject receives from mass media the vocabulary they use to understand their world. What this means is that Rodger, in any of his experiences, was conditioned by his consumption of mass media. Rodger certainly perceived the same norms and ideals of heterosexual relationships projected by mass media, and found that his own experiences were in-congruent with these depictions. With these dominant narratives unavailable as a means of articulating his experience in a favorable way, he, like many other troubled young men, sought alternative interpretations.

If Rodger's misogyny is articulated along political lines, his 2014 Isla Vista killings can be read as an act of terrorism, and in turn an effort at political speech. In 2014, Rodger stabbed three men to

¹⁸¹ "Blog: Elliot Rodger's Manifesto Shows Self-hate Fueled Anti-Asian Violence That Kicked off Isla Vista Rampage." *AALDEF*. May 25, 2014.

death in his apartment, drove to a nearby sorority and shot three female students, shot a man inside a deli, and then exchanged gunfire with police before taking his own life inside his parked car. On the In These Times website, Lindsay Beyerstein concludes that Rodger's attack was an act of terrorism, and that his choice of a specific sorority was a “symbolic target.”¹⁸² The notion that terrorists choose symbolic targets to make ideological points is not one originated within these pages, nor is the collapse of the personal-political divide. The issue with much of the literature about mass shootings is the extent to which the personal and political motivations are debated and split rather than personal motivations being seen for their political context and political motivations being seen for their personal context. In fact, there may be a question of the relevance of this question across historical epochs, as both the political and personal, or public and private spheres do not exist ahistorically and have had different definitions in different historical periods. Thompson refers to an evolving definition of the public sphere in the sense used by Jurgen Habermas, and makes the point that consolidation of media outlets into huge conglomerates has functionally narrowed the ideas and images which constituted the modern public sphere, and subverted them to a power hierarchy which exists beyond democratic or even state control.¹⁸³ If the public sphere is under private control, and the private sphere increasingly bleeds into what we consider to be the public, is it not true that continued application of the old dichotomies can be viewed in service of a hegemonic agenda?

Another historical and political dimension of Elliot Rodger's motivations and experiences is the specific parameters along which heterosexual relationships are defined. Rodger's inability to reconcile his experiences with his expectations and feelings of entitlement speaks to a profound disconnect amongst many young men of the 21st century, one in which they struggle to understand a perceived lack of success with women, defining a successful relationship with a woman as an achievement. Scholars

¹⁸² Lindsay Beyerstein, "Elliot Rodger's War on Women - Duly Noted," *In These Times*, May 26, 2014.

¹⁸³ Thompson, 239.

have remarked upon the discourse of neoliberalism as encouraging a culture of individual success and achievement, and posited that the economization of all aspects of public life has emboldened attitudes that an individual who does not experience success in one aspect of life or another has themselves to blame. In “Neoliberalism, Biodiscipline, and Cultural Critique”, William McWhorter argues that the discourse of neoliberalism as a political project extends the reach of the free market into the fields of biopower and sexual reproduction in modern societies, and transforms the subject into a “homo economicus” who seeks to maximize their capital and function as a rational economic actor in an economized field of sexual competition and reproduction.¹⁸⁴

One good example is the No Child Left Behind laws, which use standardized tests to determine which public schools are effective and which are failing. By subjecting public schools to the same rubric as a private business and cutting funding from inefficient schools, the policy has resulted in great amounts of inner city schools being closed and replaced with private charter schools which operate along roughly the same lines as a private business.¹⁸⁵ In combination with the earlier notation of mass media conglomerates controlling more and more of the global public sphere, and the subjection of more aspects of human culture and power to market forces, we can observe a pattern in which a specific school of economics has become the dominant school of thought for human affairs in the modern world. In a crude sense, Rodger’s ideology is one specific critique of this system of ideas and practices.

The larger movement to optimize or streamline every aspect of human societies has spawned an entire industry of seduction professionals. For men who perceive a lack of success with female partners relative to their expectations, the pick-up artist offers them a body of empirical knowledge and techniques to assist them. The notion of empirical knowledge and technical reasoning as applied to

¹⁸⁴ William Wilkerson, “Neoliberalism, biodiscipline, and cultural critique”. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 1:(2010): 64-73.

¹⁸⁵ Christopher H. Tienken. “Neoliberalism, social darwinism, and consumerism masquerading as school reform.” *Interchange* 43 (4) 2013: 295-316.

human reality is a hallmark of the neoliberal epoch, as is the notion that any human interaction can be conceived of as a market and treated as an opportunity for success or failure.¹⁸⁶

The pick-up artist and their ideas carry political implications, valuing traditional masculinity and the alpha male and rejecting feminism.¹⁸⁷ Elliot Rodger's links to these organizations and ideas was indeed publicized, as were the efforts of numerous individuals in his life to improve his skills in interacting with women. Beyond the pick-up artists are the anti-pick up artist community, individuals and organizations who view pick up artists and their ilk as charlatans and seek to discredit their ideas. In these circles, antipathy towards women is much more pronounced, and the focus is on the experiences of “incels”, or the involuntarily celibate. Rodger was also found frequenting these discussions, and posted comments on “PUAHate.com.”¹⁸⁸ Failing to succeed with women on their own, then failing to succeed employing the lessons of the pick-up artist, Rodger and his ilk discussed women and their perceived vagaries, as well as their sentiments on race, economics, and masculine identity.¹⁸⁹ While misguided and misdirected, the sentiments of the anti-pickup artist community are in their own way a critique of the application of free market concepts to heterosexual relationships.

While the causation between mass shootings and the internet remains bereft of a definite answer, there are a few interesting explanations. Rene Girard's acolytes, for example, would posit that human violence is the result of mimetic rivalry, in which two persons both desire the same thing and cannot both possess it. For Girard, desire is mediated through mimesis in that people typically desire things they perceive others as desiring. A mass media application of the theory of mimesis is relatively straightforward, as the modern subject can observe and desire a wide array of experiences and objects.

¹⁸⁶ R Almog., and D. Kaplan, “The nerd and his discontent: The seduction community and the logic of the game as a geeky solution to the challenges of young masculinity.” *Men and Masculinities*, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Michael Koziol, "Elliot Rodger and the Creepy World of the Pick-up Artist." *The Sydney Morning Herald*. May 28, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Nicky Woolf, "'PUAHate' and 'ForeverAlone': Inside Elliot Rodger's Online Life." *The Guardian*. May 30, 2014.

¹⁸⁹ Woolf.

In the context of accelerated mimesis, it follows that the result would be accelerated mimetic rivalry and accelerated violence.

A more applicable theory, however, is the idea of terrorism as mediated political communication. Just as Anders Breivik targeted the summer camp at Utoya for its symbolic significance and relied on the Norwegian and international press to deliver his message for him, Elliot Rodger chose a specific sorority not only for what it represented to him (sexual denial and rejection) but also what the sorority represents in American popular culture. Media coverage of Rodger's attack followed a similar pattern to Breivik's coverage, with various pundits placing the blame on gun culture, misogyny, mental illness, both right and left wing politics, and in some cases the decline of "traditional values". Returning to Stuart Hall's model of communications, we observe that Rodger's message was encoded with a certain set of signs, and reproduced through media coverage of his attacks. Referring to our earlier discussions on cinema and online discourse, we can note that Elliot Rodger's acts exist within a field of symbols which refer to the exact ideas his writing is concerned with, namely white male identity, sexual entitlement and rejection, and violent retribution against an unjust world.

On the late Andrew Breitbart's website, we can point to a post by notorious commentator Milo Yiannopoulos entitled "Killer Virgin Was a Madman, Not a Misogynist". Yiannopoulos's post holds many of the hallmarks of mass shooter discourse that we have discussed previously, most notably the effort to remove the cultural and political subtext of Rodger's thought and attacks and place it within the field of "madness", which is to say "non-speech." Yiannopoulos ultimately attributes the causality in Rodger's attacks to the "blurring of fantasy and reality" amongst this generation's young men, and divorces Rodger's thought from cultural issues of misogyny.¹⁹⁰ Curiously, a changing relationship between mediated communication and "reality" itself is indeed a major factor in the development of the

¹⁹⁰ Milo Yiannopoulos, "Killer Virgin Was a Madman, Not a Misogynist - Breitbart." *Breitbart News*, May 27, 2014.

“mass shooting”, so this may be a case of the right conclusion via the wrong trajectory and in the service of the wrong agenda. What is most important is Yiannopoulos’s use of the term “Killer Virgin”, the term used by the New York Post most notably to refer to Rodger. Again, in the New York Post’s coverage we see the term “Killer Virgin”, part of a larger pattern which implies that these violent outbursts are a natural response to sexual frustration on the part of the perpetrators. This is a problematic practice, because Rodger himself explicitly said that his lack of sexual fulfillment was the exact motive for his violent acts. Considering this fact, we can observe that at least one major media outlet directly popularized and reproduced Rodger’s narrative and message for him. This means that Rodger’s message, at least in these two cases, was encoded and decoded per plan.

Slate.com documented the response of the “pick up artist community” and “anti-pick up artist community” themselves. Many PUAHate.com members ridiculed Rodger and distanced themselves from him, and many members of the “pick up artist” community claimed that he had improperly applied their principles, and that his killings could have been averted had he learned “the game” and experienced greater success with women.¹⁹¹ The Slate commentators made short work of the implication that the result of sexual frustration was spree violence, and made the point that both communities contributed to a culture of misogyny by putting forward pseudo-scientific theories for explaining women and their interactions with men. What is important to note here is that, for all their vagaries, the pick-up artist community in many ways has a message which is compatible with mainstream discourse notably that sexual interactions and relationships occur within a “market” setting and that an individual can optimize themselves and their sexual capital. The anti-pick up artist thinkers, however, posit that this is not the case, and that there are deeper forces and factors in play. The latter set of ideas rejects the premise of the former, and does not reproduce its internal logic in terms of economic rationalism as applied to human

¹⁹¹ Amanda Hess, "The Pick-Up Artist Community’s Predictable, Horrible Response to a Mass Murder." *Slate Magazine*. May 24, 2014.

sexuality.

Notably absent from Slate's discussion is a consideration of the pseudo-scientific theories applied to societal notions of success and failure under neoliberal capitalism. While a science of seducing women may seem obviously unfounded on its face, the pick-up artist is ultimately just the application of a much larger theoretical framework to a specific question. Namely, the idea that market principles and technical reasoning can be applied to human reality. In the mainstream media, we can find numerous examples of evolutionary psychology and biological studies as applied to romantic relationships and their successes and failures. In the case of Breivik, he could concoct a series of far-right ideas and theories to explain his experience, and for Rodger the idea of victimization by women and the need for scientific methods to control and improve them was the answer to his difficult experiences.

Much like Breivik's attack on the island of Utoya was an act of mediated political communication, Rodger's release of his manifesto to the media and choice of targets and methods utilized a specific symbolic vocabulary and did indeed publicize his ideas and associations in the media. Rodger's attacks were much less effective in their communicative effect than Breivik's, not only because of his diminished access to weapons and more rudimentary plans, but also because his ideology and political platform was much less defined and explicit. Rodger himself may have perceived his ideas as apolitical and himself as devoid of a political agenda, but if politics is defined as human relations in terms of power and dominance, it is clear which political subjects he placed at the top of his vision of a utopian society and which he relegated to its margins. It may indeed be true that highly communicative acts of political violence are more likely to be considered by the media as "terrorism" whereas acts with a less defined message or political content are defined in terms of mental illness or personal deviance, and that "terrorism" may be defined in terms of an act's threat to dominant discourse as opposed to the

actual acts of violence entailed.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of the last 4 chapters, we have considered the mass shooting as a communicative media event, but also as a historical development. One question which has loomed large is when did the mass shooting as an event begin? The obvious answer is that ever since firearms have been available to private citizens of any polity, there have most likely been shootings in public areas. We are left with the question of when this phenomenon began to be labeled a mass shooting. It is difficult to tell, but one clue can be gleaned from the fact that the Congressional Research Institute's study of mass shootings begins with cases from 1999. Students of the media will recall that the public violence concern of pre-911 America was the school shooting, and to a certain extent school shootings and their ensuing literature have carried over into the discourse of the "mass shooting". The Columbine shootings for example, make appearances in the literature on mass shootings, despite being formerly included in the school shooting category. Without belaboring the point, it seems clear based on even this cursory reading of its genealogy that the term "mass shooting" reflects a different interpretation of a preexisting phenomenon, a difference to which historians should of course attribute to differing historical circumstances.

What historical developments could spawn the "mass shooting" as a discursive category? For one possible explanation, we return to John Thompson and *The Media and Modernity*. Thompson's conclusion is that the proliferation of mass media on a global scale, and classical liberal thought's inability to reconcile with the potential consequences, is that the public sphere of modern democracies has been radically renegotiated.¹⁹² We recall Thompson's assertion that modern subjects exist in conversation

¹⁹² Thompson, 240.

with mass media, and that modern societies can meaningfully exist because of the development of mediated communication on a mass scale. Thompson states that “the public sphere” exists in mediated space, and notes that most mass media in the world, and especially that of the United States, is under private control. Linking all these ideas together, we find that the mechanism via which modern societies function has fallen into the hands of a few conglomerates.¹⁹³ Polemics aside, it is at this point that we link back to the “market fundamentalisms” of Elliot Rodger’s America. In studying Rodger’s life and thought, we discovered the influence of free market thinking on turn of the century feminism, bodybuilding culture, the seduction community, and shifting ideas of masculinity itself.

As the public sphere is increasingly under private control, more and more of the private sphere is posted on the internet for thousands of viewers (we recall Rodger’s YouTube videos), and more and more ideas circulate in which social matters are subordinated to the “natural” law of the market, it is clear if nothing else that the traditional ways we grapple with subjectivity, experience, and the personal/political divide need to be radically changed. The relationship between material space and the mediated public sphere is almost impossibly complex. The most important point to keep in mind in Thompson’s and (Habermas’) notion of the public sphere as a media space instead of a physically public place, such as a park or town square.¹⁹⁴ What we can glean from the mass shooting, is that it not only has taken place in public spaces, but also that it occurs within the public sphere of mass media. Which is to say that by interpreting a specific scenario as a mass shooting, the media itself has drawn the physical event into its own discourse. If there is any conclusion to be drawn about the development of the mass shooting as a media event and as a concept, it is that evolving definitions of publicness and gradual changes in

¹⁹³ Thompson, 240.

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, 70.

the mechanics of how public space functions, have created differing circumstances in the media interpretations of acts of public violence. In the cases of Rodger and Breivik, we can observe this principle in the fact that a mass shooting took place not in a country which shared cultural values about violence with America, but a nation which shared communications and media with America.

I have different approaches have been used to analyze the cases of Anders Breivik and Elliot Rodger. The discussion of Breivik's life and thought has taken place on different terms than that of Rodger's, and the chapters on Elliot Rodger have in some ways ended up being about his ideas only indirectly. There are a couple reasons for this, some intentional and some circumstantial.

Anders Breivik supplied a manifesto which was almost 2000 pages long, and contained numerous passages which were interpolated, copied and pasted, and in some cases plagiarized. As such, his ideology and his referents and influences were clearly displayed. Considering this, the political implications of his thought and the exact relevance of his ideas to modern European politics were not especially difficult to parse. As noted in the chapters on Breivik, very few of his opinions are foreign to the European right, and in some cases members of mainstream European parties were understanding of his motivations if not sympathetic to his actions.¹⁹⁵ Regarding Breivik's politics, the only way in which his ideas diverged from that of other European right populist thinkers was in terms of their degree, and of course in terms of his proposed solution. This is the discursive break described in both chapters, namely that Breivik perceived an act of mass violence to be his only discursive recourse, attempting to jump start a revolution of "European patriots" to fight back against the supposed Islamicization of Europe.

¹⁹⁵ John Hooper, "Ex-Berlusconi Minister Defends Breivik," *The Guardian*. June 27, 2011.

Explaining Breivik's politics was very simple. The real work in Breivik's case was dealing with his personal background, the extent to which historical forces affected his personal outcomes, and showing where the causal links to mass media existed. On this front, it has been argued that Breivik perceived a series of changes in Norwegian governance to be the root of his personal difficulties. Strife in his relationship with his mother and ensuing difficulties with other women was attributed to Gro Harlem Brundtland's tenure as Prime Minister, and her promotion of a change in Norwegian gender politics. Breivik also disagreed with Norway's perceived laxity on immigration, and bought into the "Rape of Europa" narrative, in which Europe is perceived as a supine woman under threat of sexual violence by the Muslim "Other". These two feelings were not unrelated, however, and I have argued that Breivik not only perceived the Norwegian state as a feminized structure, but also suspected that the oppressive feminine state desired sexual violence against itself from the Muslim world. For Breivik, this created a scheme of feelings in which he himself was erotically rejected by a feminized Norway in favor of a comparatively stronger and more virile Muslim immigrant suitor. Diminished desirability for Norwegian men appeared in Breivik's writings, as did his own theories on women secretly "desiring" sexual violence. While the motive of a right-wing populist challenge to European "multicultural hegemony" is relatively straightforward to discern in Breivik's attacks and writings, these deeper themes of race and gender took a bit of leg work. While the explanation is highly speculative and cultural, it has also been argued elsewhere that cultural antagonisms lie at the root of the mass shooting, and at the very least it is hoped that cohesion and coherence has been achieved regarding the arguments in play. White male identity politics are also an almost universally accepted factor in the proliferation of mass shootings, and here as well this is taken to be the case.

Anders Breivik struggled to integrate into the communications of the people around him from an early age, and to a certain extent always felt alienated from his surroundings. We have also noted that

his essential feeling of rebelliousness and hate for authority manifested early on and found numerous different expressions, from the “Kebab Norwegian” and graffiti of his teen years, to his involvement in right wing politics, and ultimately his terrorist attacks. We have also considered the utter cruelty and callousness of his acts as an intentional act, and concluded that he embraced his role as the ultimate villain of 21st century Europe on purpose. Breivik labeled himself “the worst monster since Quisling”, and felt that to a certain extent the evil of his act was justified in light of his effort to destroy what he himself perceived as an unjust and evil world.

Elliot Rodger had his own taste for apocalyptic violence and world-historical destruction. On the last page of his manifesto, he writes “I will punish *everyone*. And it will be beautiful.”¹⁹⁶ He also stated a few pages earlier, that “through my suffering, I have been able to see how twisted and wrong this world really is.”¹⁹⁷ In his 20 years of life as an “incel”, Rodger increasingly felt that there was something inherently wrong with civilization itself which produced his difficulties with women. Despite their similar conclusions, vastly different methods and approaches have been needed to contend with the life, thought, and attacks of Breivik and Rodger. Mass media outlets extensively covered the personal trials and shortcomings of both men, and attributed their acts to numerous personal motivations or experiences. As noted earlier, the motivations presented by both men in their writings were often the motivations presented by the mass media. However, mass media coverage of Rodger and Breivik was vastly different in one aspect. Breivik was covered primarily from a perspective of his personal life, but his political thought and writings were dealt with in detail as well. Rodger, on the other hand, was read almost entirely as a pathological and mentally ill actor, and even his crude political and social statements online

¹⁹⁶ Rodger, 137.

¹⁹⁷ Rodger, 135.

were subordinated to his personal issues in the discourse of mass media coverage of his attacks. To re-frame the difference, Breivik was perceived as contemplating his role in the world both personally and politically, whereas Rodger was perceived only holding views which reflected his opinions on his own life. Keen readers will note the conundrum created for any researcher working on both cases, namely that the political implications of Rodger's thought were not available in primary or secondary sources. To discuss both men in terms of the personal/political divide and the intersection of personal subjectivity and historical reality, we had to draw out Rodger's political views. While they dead end into violence and nihilism in the end of the manifesto, they hinge on white male identity and sexual rejection in the same way as Breivik's ideas, and locate feminism as the historical fulcrum leading to modern problems.

We considered the rise of the seduction community, and the fact that Rodger heavily spent time on bodybuilding forums. From this, we determined that Rodger was a devotee of numerous schools of thought which apply free-market based thinking to different spheres of human reality, and hold that any aspect of a person's life can be optimized and perform better on social markets, whether they be sexual, emotional, employment prospect related, or even physical. This was the alternative discourse which Rodger sought to explain his life difficulties, and when it ultimately failed, he resorted to violence in the same way as Breivik. While it is true that Rodger embraced ideas with economic implications, we had not yet established the link to the realm of the political until we considered Nancy Fraser's piece in *The Future of Gender* and contended with her perspective that the defeat of social democracy at the end of the Cold War created a field in which free market thinking had achieved hegemony. The specific context for this insight was a shift in feminist thought from political economy to the cultural realm, which brings us to the next crucial point about Rodger's politics.

Despite the obvious influence of economic theory on Rodger's ideas, economic concerns themselves never appear in his writing except when subordinated to cultural issues. Indeed, Rodger's political

programme is entirely cultural, but also curiously materialist and essentialist. This is the crucial insight gleaned from Fraser, that in American politics the hegemony of “neoliberal” economic thought has created a sphere in which cultural struggles are the only real political conflict. Much like Anders Breivik’s ideas are in no way foreign to the European right, it has been argued that Rodger’s ideas are themselves firmly within the spectrum of today’s American “alternative right”. Thus, Rodger differs from his fellow “anti-feminists”, “radical traditionalists”, and the like regarding his methodologies and the degree of his alienation from social reality itself, but not the basic substance of his ideas.

It is important at this point to clarify what is meant by “cultural antagonisms”, and bring together the discussions of the concept in the cases of Breivik and Rodger. We will also explain the historical argument in play regarding their application to the cases. Various thinkers have expounded on the changing field of political discourse and rhetoric in the Western world following the triumph of neoliberal economic ideas after the end of the Cold War. Frederic Jameson has argued, in both *A Singular Modernity* and *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,¹⁹⁸ that the postmodern and the neoliberal both refer to historical scenarios in which one model of economic organization has achieved hegemony not only in the United States and Europe, but also globally. This view has been challenged recently by theorists of “alter-modernities,” on the grounds that Jameson’s analysis overly privileges the Western perspective. Nonetheless, our thinking here continues to reflect Jameson’s basic Marxian assertion that political and cultural realities reflect the material foundations of the society in which they take place. As such, we have agreed that the victory of neoliberal economic thought in the political sphere has created ideologies which either reflect free-market ideas or assume that the market is the basic organizing principle of reality. Thus, the political field in both the United States and Europe has become a cultural field,

¹⁹⁸ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1993).

in that economic concerns are taken for granted to have a default answer. In this new context, we can observe the development of cultural antagonisms.

At the beginning of the research here, it was assumed that both Breivik and Rodger's attacks were intended as challenges to neoliberal hegemony, and posed as threats to the predomination of market-based thinking in theories of human reality. Breivik and Rodger's attacks were presumed to be misguided critiques of a basic problem. In time, however, it became clear that the mass media coverage of the attacks perfectly transmitted the basic meaning of what Breivik and Rodger wanted to say. What this illustrated was that Rodger and Breivik did not actually challenge the paradigm of their societies, but rather articulated cultural positions which were intelligible within the political discourse of their societies. This is to say that rather than being misinterpreted by the mass media, Breivik and Rodger were in fact understood perfectly. Feminists, immigrant advocates, Marxists, and Labour Party members understood perfectly well that Breivik's act was an attack on their ideals, just as American feminists understood that Rodger's attack was directed at what he understood to be modern feminism.

How could it be that Breivik and Rodger could attack the very foundations of their societies, but still be understood and contended with in the mass media sphere? The explanation we have offered is that Breivik and Rodger both articulated opinions firmly within the bounds of the *cultural antagonisms* of Western modernity. Marxist thinkers have defined an "antagonism" as a social system or construct in which two diametrically opposed forces struggle for dominance and control. What is important to note is that the concept of "antagonism" denotes that both sides constitute a cohesive whole, in that they complement each other. In our research, we have concluded that Breivik and Rodger's thought and acts were within the spectrum of various cultural antagonisms, and that the hegemony of neoliberal ideas in Western politics has created a field of cultural struggles in which the two sides complement each other. For example, American feminism, in its focus on androcentric cultural values, has created a field in which

“feminism” defined a certain way struggles with “anti-feminism”, or the opposite of that set of ideas. While the “feminism” seen in mass media and its opposite are oppositional, they each follow the internal logic of the other, and hence are defined via their opposition. Therefore, Breivik and Rodger’s attacks were so successful as political and personal statements, because the symbolic vocabulary they chose in formulated their tactics was based on the logic of cultural antagonisms.

We will again contend with the question of madness. It has been emphasized again and again in these pages that mental illness was presented as a motivation for these attacks not only as a measured deduction of a possible factor, but also as a possible screen for what was happening in these cases. Foucault’s notion of madness in the modern world was based on the exclusion of various knowledges and perspectives from the development of one singular discourse for state-oriented political systems. As such, various political critiques of a prevailing order or behaviors which deviated from the norm have been boiled down to madness. We can in this case recall the work of historians on “drapetomania”, or the supposed mental illness which would cause American slaves to escape from their captivity, or the work of feminist historians on “hysteria” in the 19th century.

Initially, the working hypothesis was that the “madness” label as applied to Breivik or Rodger was a refusal to consider their critiques of their societies, as misguided as they were. As time went on and the research progressed, it became clear that this view supported Breivik and Rodger’s viewpoints. What we have come to grasp is that “madness” as applied to the two men is a misunderstanding of their attacks as communicative acts. While the two men could very well have been mentally ill, they did not struggle to communicate within the paradigms of their societies, as demonstrated by the appearance of their ideas and experience in the mass media coverage of their attacks. What is indeed true is that they found themselves able to communicate via acts of public violence, motivated by a perceived failure on the part of the modern world to meet their personal needs. This too, is not without its historical context.

Not only have we discussed theories of 9/11 as a communicative and rhetorical act, we have also seen that the evolving definition of the “public sphere” as a space has increasingly involved mediated communication. If it is true that “anything you do in public is political”, as Hannah Arendt commented, then anything that occurs in the mass media sphere must itself be political. Curiously, this brings us back to Stuart Hall and his Birmingham contemporaries, who posited that the mass media was a site of political and cultural struggles, as opposed to a top down apparatus of control and manipulation.

Above all, the following points have been argued. The first is that mass shootings are made by the mass media and the knowledge producing bodies which dictate what is or is not a mass shooting. The second is that mass shootings are most usefully apprehended as communicative acts which utilize symbolic vocabularies to assert a specific point, be it cultural, political or personal. These arguments are largely ahistorical, and specific to our own epoch.

The historical argument is that the proliferation of mass media has created a proliferation of communicative violence over the last half century, and that mass shootings are most usefully regarded within this continuity. Insofar as the histories of violence and the mass media can be separated, the mass shooting should be located at the intersection of the two. In the cases of Elliot Rodger and Anders Breivik, the same core issues have been identified. Namely, both men had concerns about whiteness, masculinity, and politics, and responded to a difficulty in communication with an act of communicative violence. Both men also thought and wrote in a context where cultural struggles and antagonisms formed the substance of political discourse, and found their lives touched by the paradigm shifts of the end of the century in hugely consequential ways. Without downplaying their own agencies, we can conclude with absolute certainty that both men and their acts are products of historical circumstances, rather than inexplicable aberrations.

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ABSTRACT**ANDERS BREIVIK AND ELLIOT RODGER: VIOLENCE, COMMUNICATION AND THE MEDIATED SPHERE.**

By

Walter Anthony Lucken IV

December, 2016.

Advisor: Dr. Aaron Retish**Major:** History**Degree:** Master of Arts

The “mass shooting” has become a major hallmark of everyday news and discussions in mass media. Through the lens of two specific cases, this research situates the mass shooting within a few preexisting historical continuities and disciplines. The mass shooting is read as a communicative media event, and is considered from the perspective of mass media proliferation, political violence, discourse, semiotics, and turn of the century cultural antagonisms. The methods employed herein are textual analysis, rhetorical analysis, and post-Marxian models of historical causation.

The mass shooting is an outgrowth of global consolidation and proliferation of mass media. The mass shootings considered herein are communicative acts which articulate specific positions, intelligible along the spectrum of notable cultural antagonisms in the neoliberal world, including feminism vs. antifeminism, and multiculturalism vs. ethnonationalism. It is argued that these debates form mutually cohesive and complementary ideological systems, and that a focus in political discourse on cultural conflicts as opposed to questions of political economy has a clear historical basis in the Western world following the end of the Cold War.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Walter Anthony Lucken IV is a graduate of Michigan State University's College of Social Science, holding a BA in History from said institution. As an MA student at Wayne State University, his areas of focus have been violence, mass media, modernity, and intellectual development. He lives and works in Detroit.

